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“ESTAMOS EN TODAS PARTES”: MALE HOMOSEXUALITY, NATION, AND
MODERNITY IN TWENTIETH CENTURY MEXICO

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

In broad strokes my research investigates the intersections between the nation, citizenship, masculinity, and culture as engaged through the lenses of gender, sexuality, and transnational flows of ideas and people. My project is a genealogy of what Mexican citizenship has and has not included as told through discourses on homosexuality and the experiences of homosexuals, a group that for the majority of the 20th century were largely excluded from full citizenship. This did not mean homosexuals were unimportant; on the contrary, they were the foils against which the ideal Mexican could be defined and participants in both democracy and citizenship through their negation. The experiences and challenges faced by homosexuals illuminate the great, if gradual shift, from exclusive definitions of citizenship towards more universal forms of citizenship, however flawed, found in Mexico's current multiculturalism. In fact, homosexuals' trajectory from a maligned anti-Mexican group to representatives of pluralist democracy by the late 1970s sheds important light on how Mexico shifted from oligarchy through paternalist state-interventionism towards more participatory politics and towards an understanding of citizenship that incorporated pride parades as Mexican and homosexuals as worthy of state-sanctioned marriage by 2009, even as the structural causes of homophobia remained. Moreover, the convergences between local realities, national aspirations, and transnational flows of culture and ideas—all of which were fundamental in post-revolutionary Mexican nation-building—are best understood in relation to homosexuality.

This work has two interrelated objectives: first to reconstruct queer Mexican men's lived experiences and second, to interrogate how effeminate homosexuals became not only popular cultural foils, but also crucial "others" against which Mexican national identity—as exemplified by the masculine patriarch—was defined. I thus examine Mexican queer sexuality in two

registers: as a social historical formation of queer male identities and communities, and as a cultural historical articulation of Mexican national identity. I argue that the very category of “queer Mexican (man),” created as a pathology by social reformers, medical experts, and jurists, was foundational to the *longue durée* of political debates on citizenship and civil rights. Homosexuality was a key concern both *in* the formation of national identity, cultural icons, and ideologies that had far-reaching consequences, as well as *for* cultural, political, and medical-juridical authorities seeking to fashion Mexican modernity.

As Mexican democracy was shaped through revolution, war, socio-cultural engineering, politics, and social movements, the line between those included and excluded from participation in that democracy remained unstable. This meant that what constituted a good citizen also shifted over time. Even so, at its core the dominant publicized ideal of the ideal Mexican citizen remained male, heterosexual, hard-working in industry or agriculture, and a family provider. Between 1920 and 1960, the Mexican government embarked on an effort to solidify the nation through the propagation of this ideal citizen through propaganda, public art, education, cinema, and even Mexican-style wrestling. At the same time, numerous Mexicans resisted these definitions. For their part, homosexuals, rather than being obscured in the proverbial closet, challenged their exclusion and asserted that they were in fact model, law-abiding citizens, not anti-social delinquents, sinners, or criminals. In this way, their efforts foreshadowed the democratic opening that would accelerate in the late 1960s and beyond, as well as the eventual granting of more rights—including marriage—to LGBT individuals in the capital by 2009.

For my parents, who always believed in me

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Introduction

This dissertation began with two deceptively simple questions: what were the experiences of homosexual Mexicans prior to the LGBT rights movements starting in the 1970s, and how were these experiences, if at all, connected to national development, citizenship, and the emergence of post-revolutionary Mexican identity? That is, did homosexuality play a role in the transition from “many Mexicos” to the post-revolutionary Mexican state that based its legitimacy on broad based political, cultural, and social alliances?

Initially, I was told that homosexuals did not exist prior to the 1970s or that if they did, there were few of them because homosexuality was not something discussed in the public sphere or in official documents. This perspective is understandable, given the controversial nature of homosexuality. Similarly, activists, writers, and scholars largely painted a picture of homosexuality as playing a significant role in Mexican society only after homosexual liberation. Prior to that time, it was said, homosexuals lacked the community structures, identities, and socialization to conceive of themselves as anything more than isolated deviants within a hegemonic, homophobic society. And as for homosexuality itself, it was never a primary concern, so the story went, of officials who were focused on charting Mexico’s course to national development between the shoals of the “Indian” question, American imperialism, and the factionalization that marked Mexican politics and culture for decades.

Yet, as often happens when we consider the past, these perspectives were a product of contemporary biases—political, cultural, and disciplinary—rather than of historical fact. Indeed, thousands of sources—including letters, periodicals, case files, crime reports, memoirs, photographs, literary texts, professional studies, surveys, and oral histories—attest to the importance of homosexuality in discourses on Mexican identity and nation prior to homosexual liberation. I have used only a select group for this dissertation that is representative, but not

exhaustive, of those that exist; nevertheless, my arguments are built on the most comprehensive research ever completed on homosexuality in studies of Mexican history.

In broad strokes, this dissertation is a genealogy of the painful, contested, and incomplete transitions between exclusive forms of Mexican citizenship and those that aspired to broad inclusiveness. These transitions occurred at the convergence of national interests, transnational webs of consumption and meaning, and the bodies and experiences of ordinary citizens who authorities sought to shape into a certain form of citizen or to excise from the body politic altogether like a cancer. It is a story of the expansion and limits of Mexican state power vis-à-vis its citizenry, the efforts to articulate what *mexicanidad* (Mexicanness) was and how it would function, and the maturation of Mexican modernity during the post-revolutionary period.

My innovation is to investigate each of these transitions through the discourses that circulated on homosexuality—in politics, the press, criminology, and sexology—and the experiences of homosexuals through the period. We need these histories—of homosexuals and of homosexuality—because they offer a crucial prism without which the full extent of the post-revolutionary regime’s reliance on ideologies of virile citizenship and the consequences of this reliance remain obscure. Likewise, the processes of Mexican national development, largely discussed in racial terms, require further illumination through the prisms of sexuality and gender because the way in which citizenship was defined required an effeminate, homosexual other as a foil who was not and could not be imagined as vital to the post-revolutionary order.

This dissertation answers the orienting questions I posed above simply: homosexuality is a necessary historical subject in studying Mexico because how it was understood, how it was experienced, and how it was deployed by a variety of social actors helped delineate the successes and failures of Mexican revolutionary aims. This, then, is the story of a nation as told through

one of its most marginalized groups that was nevertheless comprised of individuals who saw themselves as part of the Mexican experience. Incorporated officially into the national project only through negation, homosexuals nonetheless participated in Mexican society at multiple levels, in the erotic revolution that was part of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1921), and in the process of defining Mexican nationhood. Indeed, in the resistance they offered to narrow definitions of citizenship and in the liminal contact zones—between the local, national, and transnational—that they administered as part of their social sphere, they exemplified some of the most revolutionary spirit that existed during Mexico's twentieth century.

In sum, my project focuses on how definitions of Mexican citizenship—and what was excluded from that definition—shifted during the twentieth century. As Mexican democracy was shaped through revolution, war, socio-cultural engineering, politics, and social movements, the line between those included and excluded from participation in that democracy remained unstable. This meant that what constituted a good citizen also shifted over time, and, I contend, it did so in relation to significant changes in sex/gender norms and opportunities that were unleashed by the Revolution. Even so, at its core the dominant publicized image of the ideal Mexican citizen remained male, heterosexual, hard-working in industry or agriculture, and a family provider. This is because the Mexican state, along with various political, institutional, and cultural authorities, sought to clearly define citizenship as a necessary step towards modernity, and this citizenship was exclusive in nature. In other words, these authorities used gender and sexuality as tools to limit citizenship.¹ Thus, citizenship—and who was and who was not fit for

¹ Between 1920 and 1960, the Mexican government embarked on an effort to solidify the nation through the propagation of this ideal citizen in propaganda, public art, education, cinema, and even Mexican-style wrestling. At the same time, numerous Mexicans resisted these definitions, from women asserting voting rights to Catholics rejecting post-Revolutionary secularism. For their part, homosexuals, rather than being obscured in the proverbial closet, challenged their exclusion and asserted that they were in fact model, law-abiding citizens, not anti-social sinners or criminals.

it—was intimately linked to understandings of what was normal or not in sexual and gendered terms. A “good” citizen, then, was necessarily heterosexual and masculine, and homosexuality was crucial for defining normalcy and is key to seeing this heteronormative symbiosis.

The experiences and challenges faced by homosexuals illuminate the great, if gradual shift, from exclusive definitions of citizenship towards universal forms of citizenship, however flawed, found in Mexico’s current multiculturalism. In fact, homosexuals’ trajectory from a maligned anti-Mexican group to representatives of pluralist democracy by the late 1970s is critical for understanding how Mexico shifted from oligarchy through paternalist state-interventionism towards more democratic politics. Even as some homosexuals were complicit, in part, with state or normative cultural agendas, as a whole, homosexuals were the single group that enjoyed no cultural meaning except through negation. While citizenship was also defined through and against various other groups—such as women, indigenous groups, and immigrants—homosexuals largely did not have social value or status (certainly not as a group) that the others, at least ideologically, did. When pride parades became seen as Mexican and homosexuals as deserving of state-sanctioned marriage in the capital by 2009, even as the structural causes of homophobia remained, it marked a major milestone in the expansion of Mexican citizenship. Illuminating how this came to be also illuminates both the largely unacknowledged links between citizenship and sexuality and the importance of these links in delineating larger understandings of exclusivity and inclusivity at the local, national, and transnational levels.

In this introduction, I lay out the stakes and aims of my project, as well as the extent of the sources I marshal in the following chapters—which number in the thousands. I begin with a number—41—and detail its origins in the “birth” of Mexican homosexuality in 1901 and how it

signified for most of the century behaviors and identities that were an anathema to Mexican nationalism. I also critic both the received view on Mexican homosexuality as a historical subject and debunk the myths about Mexican homosexuality that cloud its role in shaping the nation.

A Note on Terminology

Before I continue, it is important to define the use of my terms. I have tried to limit my use of the term *queer* because it was produced in a different time and place than the dissertation covers; nevertheless, it provides an important means to group non-normative sexualities—inclusive of but not limited to homosexuals and other men who had sex with men—into a larger category that challenged normativity. Queer is thus a blanket term describing both those who asserted non-normative behaviors and identities, and those participating in both who nevertheless also claimed to be “normal” on a quotidian or public basis. I use it also as a verb in order to “queer” the normative Mexican histories and historiographies, as well as to point out how Mexican homosexuals “queered” heteronormative structures through their actions and identities. In general, I use the term *homosexual* to refer to those men for whom same-sex interactions was a primary aspect of their lives; this term also includes both effeminate and masculine-identifying men. Homosexual as a term also circulated in Mexico early in the twentieth century. *Homoerotic* refers to the interactions between men that carried sexual desire, even if it was not consummated, while *homosocial* refers to the same-sex bonding that could include, but was not limited to, the homoerotic. Period terms like *afeminados*, *jotos*, and *invertidos* are used frequently, and just as in the period, largely interchangeably, although I prefer *afeminados* because it appears more frequently in my sources. While generally these terms were used to describe men who were more “effeminate,” critics at times used them to refer to any homosexual, because homosexuality was regarded as necessarily effeminizing. Mexican homosexuals formed the *ambiente*, the queer

social world that was largely comprised of—but not limited to—homosexuals that existed in Mexican urban centers. With its meaning allegedly a derivative of the US American term *gay*, it was comprised of an archipelago of contact zones where barriers between classes, genders, races, and sexualities became permeable. My use of the term, though, is not limited to a focus on elites, as it has often been used, as working-class men comprised the larger proportion of those who inhabited the *ambiente*.

I. Literature Review and The Need for a Historical Approach

This study is not the first to look at homosexuality as a subject important to understanding Mexican society, although no previous study has its same scope. I argue that re-centering homosexual men in the history of the Mexican nation and citizenship serves not only to add sexuality into that history, but also to reorient our understandings of the terms, conditions, and processes through which that citizenship unfolded. As scholar Emilio Bejel has argued, “so-called national identity is largely determined as a function of what it is not—or, better yet, of what it *thinks* it is not—at any given moment and from specific discursive formations.”² Like Bejel did for Cuba, my project demonstrates how at multiple moments, sexuality was a constitutive element in delineating the borders between citizen and non-citizen, but it does so through investigations of both social history (i.e., the “recovery” of social histories of homosexuality) and the way in which homosexuality factored into the discursive sphere.

An early example of research into Mexican homosexuality was criminologist and journalist Carlos Roumagnac’s *Los criminales en México* (1904). Roumagnac, operating in part from a Lombrosian perspective, made direct and repeated inquiries into the sexual deviance experienced by boys, men, and women at the Belén prison, both while incarcerated and outside

² Emilio Bejel, *Gay Cuban Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), xxiii.

the prison's walls.³ Such individuals were, by being incarcerated, outside the Mexican mainstream, and homosexuality was considered an aggravating factor in their delinquency (and by extension, unfitness for citizenship). A more scholarly effort to understand homosexuality—and a study marked by the tensions between competing definitions of what was and was not normal, sexually or otherwise—was psychiatrist Raul González Enríquez's *El problema sexual del hombre en la penitenciaría* (originally 1933, reprinted 1971).⁴ González audaciously attempted to move the subject of homosexuality—which in his prison case study was noted both in a situational form between men isolated from women and among “types” marked by homosexual desires and male effeminacy—into the realm of scientific and historical inquiry. While he regarded homosexuality as a “problem,” he also offered complex portraits of inmates in attempting to ascertain how best to treat the problem socially and individually.

Perhaps the most famous text dealing with homosexuality in Mexico, albeit from a theoretical, rather than from a scientific basis, was Octavio Paz's *El laberinto de soledad*.⁵ Paz set up the “active/passive binary” and like earlier scholars such as Samuel Ramos, asserted that “authentic” Mexican identity was rooted in the trauma of colonization, whereby native males had been emasculated, and attempts by men thereafter to protect themselves from domination and penetration (symbolic or physical) by others. The “man,” then, was the one who acted, while the “woman” was the person who was acted upon. Homosexuality thus only marked those who were penetrated, while the others were “real men.”

³ Carlos Roumagnac, *Los criminales en México: Ensayo de psicología criminal* (México: El Fénix, 1904). See also Carlos Roumagnac, *Crímenes sexuales y pasionales: estudio de psicología morbosa* (Mexico, D.F.: Librería de Ch. Bouret, 1906).

⁴ Raul González Enríquez, *El problema sexual del hombre en la penitenciaría* (Mexico: Editorial Citlaltepetl, 1971). This book is discussed in Chapter 4 in more detail.

⁵ Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico*, trans. Lysander Kemp (New York: Grove Press, 1961).

Like Paz, other Mexican scholars would see homosexuality as central to Mexican identity through negation. The 1959 text *Sodoma pide fuero* by Francisco Ferrer Torrents and Joan D'Oc was wholeheartedly devoted to excoriating homosexuality as something foreign, anti-Mexican, and largely a problem in the United States.⁶ The book was a direct, strident response to the emergence of more nuanced viewpoints on homosexuality that were beginning to emerge in the period, and also showcased the consolidation of multiple viewpoints on sexual and gender deviance into a specific type—the homosexual—who was not and could not be Mexican.

Beyond these, other studies covered in the following chapters discussed homosexuality as related to issues of psychology, endocrinology, education, criminology, and national development. In all of these cases, even if at times nuanced, homosexuality was a negative trait, category, or carrier of discursive meaning. However, since the 1970s, (homo)sexuality has become an increasingly important topic in academic work conducted on Mexico, both inside and outside the country's academy. Most of the works are from anthropology and sociology (e.g., Nuñez-Noriega 2007, Carrillo 2003 and 2002, Prieur 1998, Carrier 1995, Taylor 1978, and Lennox, 1976), political science (e.g., Corrales and Pecheny 2010, De la Dehesa 2010, and Lumsden 1991) and cultural studies (e.g., Monsiváis 2010 (his collected works)), Schuessler and Capistrán (2010), Irwin et. al. 2003, Irwin 2003, and Sifuentes-Jaurégui 2002).⁷

⁶ Francisco Ferrer Torrents and Joan D'Oc, *Sodoma pide fuero* (Mexico, D.F.: Editor F. Ferrer, 1959). From a search conducted through WorldCat, Ferrer also wrote a book on psychoanalysis in 1943, and thus, must be the narrator in the sections describing cases of homosexuals that were treated. A search on D'Oc shows another book, *La gran conspiración: el Vaticano en la Casa Blanca*; she likely thus wrote the sections on Catholic thinking on homosexuality and likely influenced the book's focus on the United States. This book is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

⁷ Guillermo Núñez Noriega, *Masculinidad e intimidad: identidad, sexualidad y sida* (Mexico: Miguel Angel Porrúa, 2007); Guillermo Núñez Noriega, *Sexo entre varones: poder y resistencia en el campo sexual* (Mexico: M.A. Porrúa, 1999); Hector Carrillo, "Neither Machos nor Maricones: Masculinity and Emerging Male Homosexual identities in Mexico," in *Changing Men and Masculinities in Latin America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 351-369; Héctor Carrillo, *The Night Is Young: Sexuality in Mexico in the Time of AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Annick Prieur, *Mama's House, Mexico City: On Transvestites, Queens, and Machos* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Joseph Carrier, *De los Otros: Intimacy and Homosexuality Among Mexican Men* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); Clark Taylor, "El Ambiente: Male Homosexual Social

Taylor and Lennox, writing in the 1970s, asserted the repressive nature of the relationship between Mexican political institutions and cultural values and homosexuals. Taylor's work is notable in that it sketched a brief history of homosexuality in Mexico, linking the repression he saw in the 1970s with pre-Columbian and colonial perspectives on sodomy, masculinity, and *machismo*. Both Taylor and Lennox presented ethnographies and geographies of the homosexual social world, as well as a rather bleak assessment of the possibility of homosexuals achieving significant rights, basing their perspectives in large part on contemporary informants. This pessimism appeared as well in Lumsden's *Homosexuality, Society and the State in Mexico* (1991), which offered a more developed version of the origins of homophobia—again traced to the pre-colonial and colonial periods—and a more sustained look at the relationships between homosexuals, socio-economic conditions, and the Mexican state.

These three authors participated in the bifurcation of studies of Mexican homosexuality between those more focused on the working and popular classes and those focused on elites. For many authors, the former groups were where “authentic” Mexican sexualities were to be found. Among the most important ethnographies produced in the period include those by anthropologist Joseph Carrier (conducted during the 1970s and collected in 1995) and sociologist Annick Prieur (1998). Carrier's work has been regarded as important for opening the door to high-quality research on homosexuality in the social sciences in general, and Prieur's was a more nuanced

Life in Mexico City” (Dissertation, University of California, Berkley, 1978); David R Lennox, “Homosexuality in Mexico: Repression or Liberation?” (Dissertation, Tulane, 1976); Javier Corrales and Mario Pecheny, eds., *The Politics of Sexuality in Latin America: a Reader on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Rights* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010); Rafael De la Dehesa, *Queering the Public Sphere in Mexico and Brazil: Sexual Rights Movements in Emerging Democracies* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010); Ian Lumsden, *Homosexuality, Society and the State in Mexico*, English ed. (Toronto: Canadian Gay Archives, 1991); Carlos Monsiváis, *Que se abra esa puerta: Crónicas y ensayos sobre la diversidad sexual* (Mexico, D.F.: Paidós, 2010); Michael K. Schuessler and Miguel Capistrán, eds., *México se escribe con J* (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Planeta Mexicana, Temas 'de Hoy, 2010); Robert McKee Irwin, Edward J. McCaughan, and Michelle Rocio Nasser, *The Famous 41: Sexuality and Social Control in Mexico, 1901* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Robert McKee Irwin, *Mexican Masculinities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Ben. Sifuentes-Jáuregui, *Transvestism, Masculinity, and Latin America Literature: Genders Share Flesh*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

evaluation of the slippages between masculine identity, homosexual subject positions, and relationships (sexual or otherwise) among men in a working-class suburb of Mexico City. Both, particularly Prieur, raised doubts about the efficacy of the active/male, passive/female binary, even as they both acknowledged its existence. Another work—Matthew Gutmann’s *The Meanings of Macho* (1996)—questioned the binary more thoroughly, asserting that masculinity was far more complex than Paz had asserted.⁸ While Gutmann did not focus on homosexuality, his revisionary approach opened the door for studies that rethought homosexuality from vantage points that did not assume the binary as the starting point, i.e., that homosexual interactions were identical in meaning and practice to those among heterosexuals.

While these studies were path-breaking and have influenced my work by opening a dialogue on Mexican (homo)sexuality to which I can now contribute, the majority of these studies did not provide a detailed, long-term history of either queer life in Mexico or the discourses on sexual deviance that were critical for defining Mexican national identity. Robert Mckee Irwin’s *Mexican Masculinities* is an exception, in that it traced discursive lineages through Mexican history and showed how masculinity and homosexuality became increasingly intertwined by the early twentieth century in literary works. Like Gutmann, Irwin was skeptical of Paz’s binary as the best or most accurate frame for understanding masculinity and homosexuality in Mexican society.

The most sustained effort to compile histories of homosexuals was initiated and carried out by Carlos Monsiváis, the famous chronicler and writer. Through a series of articles starting in the late twentieth century, Monsiváis deftly brought the forgotten histories of queer Mexican men into public and academic debate, and his works have furnished a number of leads that I

⁸ Matthew C. Gutmann, *The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

develop in this project. However, while his articles were informative, they also frequently lacked clear attribution, and Monsiváis made a number of claims that this study questions.⁹ For example, Monsiváis views the majority of the twentieth century—from the aftermath of the events of November 17, 1901 to summer 1978 when queer Mexicans emerged in public to demand their rights as part of grassroots activism—as one long, ongoing *redada*, i.e., roundup. In this view, aside from a few notable public examples, Mexican homosexuals lived in panic at the threats facing them and spent their lives largely isolated in the closet, only emerging briefly for sexual sorties that were acts of defiance against a homophobic, patriarchal society.¹⁰ Another was that homosexuality was only understood in terms of male effeminacy and that effeminate homosexuals *were* the homosexuals during the twentieth century.

Contrary to these views, I assert that *afeminados* and other homosexuals fashioned vibrant communities as early as 1901 in spite of the repression they faced; they also challenged legal discrimination and the prevailing norms of masculinity publicly, rather than from the obscurity of the “closet.” Moreover, these communities existed across class lines and in multiple sectors of the city. As several chapters will show, working-class neighborhoods fostered spaces of the *ambiente* that were used by both the local population and others, including wealthier individuals, from elsewhere in the city. Nor was the “type” of queer man limited to cross-dressing, effeminate males, even as they were the most visible. There were also homosexual dandies, workers, shopclerks, shoeshiners, candy-salesmen, youths, doctors, athletes, and more. Homosexuality, despite the claim of scholars like Monsiváis, was not, in fact, limited in

⁹ One of the great challenges in this work has been finding the actual sources that he used, as well as wading through the citation errors of the foundational texts about Mexican queer society. When dealing with thousands of potential sources, errors in dates or names can be the difference between finding a source and not. As such, when I have been unable to corroborate certain details, I make note of them.

¹⁰ Carlos Monsiváis, “The 41 and the Gran Redada,” in *The Famous 41: Sexuality and Social Control in Mexico, 1901*, ed. Robert McKee Irwin, Edward J. McCaughan, and Michelle Rocio Nasser (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 165.

discourses to just the effeminate male. In fact, due to the proliferation of many, often contradictory threads on what constituted an *invertido* and how their queerness could be “proved” through the intervention of medicine and criminology, several sexually deviant types became identified in Mexican society. These included, but were not limited to, “active” and “passive” pederasts, congenital/constitutional homosexuals, homosexuals that were the product of their social environment, situational or opportunistic homosexuals, and those that could “dupe” society either by appearing flawlessly as a woman or as a “normal” man. These men also constructed their own types; while many assumed feminine personas as part of their overall identity, others rejected such femininity both in their own self-presentation and in their desires for others. Couplings occurred across class-lines, age-lines, and gender-roles, just as they did among relative equals. These realities are not accounted for in the current research.

Finally, a handful of historical studies have also been important in shaping this project. Macias-González’s work on consumption by dandies (2003) was influential in orienting my own research on homosexual elites, and the article-length histories by Piccato (2007) and Buffington (2000) on Belén prison and the work of journalist/criminologist Carlos Roumagnac set the stage for my own investigations of prison life and the similarities and disconnects between experiences behind bars and those elsewhere.¹¹ These authors showed how homosexuality was fundamental to understanding modernity, both through the transnational webs of meaning and commerce it facilitated, as well as in the efforts of the state to more fully control its population. Contrary to Piccato, however, I recover the ways in which *afeminados* and “normal” men interacted outside a gendered hierarchy of power and demonstrate that Mexico City prisons were not, in fact,

¹¹ See Pablo Piccato, ““Such a Strong Need”: Sexuality and Violence in Belem Prison,” in *Gender, Sexuality, and Power in Latin America Since Independence*, ed. William E. French and Katherine Elaine Bliss (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 86-108. Robert M. Buffington, *Criminal and Citizen in Modern Mexico* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 2000). This is not an exhaustive list, as there have been studies on particular communities in the contemporary period by Mexican scholars.

microcosms of the larger society, while the penal colony at Islas Mariás was, at least in the 1930s, something of a homosexual paradise. Histories recorded more recently by Mexican scholars and activists have also influenced my work, particularly those by Rodrigo Laguarda (2009), Xabier Lizarraga (2003), Max Mejía (2001), and the first wave of the Movimiento Liberación Homosexual.

Following Lionel Cantú (2002) and José Quiroga (2000), I advance the argument that rather than “hiding under the mantle of culture in order to ascertain difference,” in Quiroga’s words—which can be said to be the perspective of much social scientific research conducted on Mexican sexuality—Mexican history should be examined for the similarities it shares with other modernizing nations in the twentieth century.¹² In other words, Mexican sexualities and identities should be studied not through the lens of the so-called “Latino-Mediterranean model” of sexuality—whose most famous example is the male/active, female/passive binary—but instead through the processes of development, national agendas, local concerns, and transnational frameworks in which they were enmeshed. Doing so reveals not only the nuanced ways in which men interacted and aspects of masculine power that would be obscured by the binary, following Núñez Noriega, but also the limits of the “myths” of Mexican homosexuality to explain not only interpersonal interactions, but also homosexuality’s status discursively, legally, and culturally within Mexican society.¹³ These myths—that homosexuals were isolated from each other and invisible to each other; that they internalized dominant gender norms (or what was presented to be such norms) and oriented relationships along strict gender stratification that mirrored heterosexual couplings; that the Mexican homosexual social world developed “behind” and only

¹² Lionel Cantú, “De Ambiente : Queer Tourism and the Shifting Boundaries of Mexican Male Sexualities,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 8, no. 1 (2002): 139-166; Jose Quiroga, *Tropics of Desire: Interventions from Queer Latino America* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 4.

¹³ See for example Núñez Noriega, *Masculinidad e intimidad*; Núñez Noriega, *Sexo entre varones*.

after the West; and that if a community existed, it was small and “disconnected” from processes elsewhere—obfuscate the rich, complex histories of homosexuality in Mexico. This study tackles them in a variety of ways, and in the conclusion I evaluate them in relation to the evidence presented here more explicitly.

My Positionality

In discussing an early draft of Chapter 2 in a writing workshop, a colleague questioned my readings of several specific primary sources related to male cross-dressing. In contrast to my assertions that cross-dressing after the Famous 41 event constituted a political act, my colleague suggested a number of alternatives and criticized my resistance narrative. These criticisms were important in my revision of that chapter and the dissertation as a whole.

Yet, the writing of any history is a political act; the reason that histories of sexuality are often deemed *overly* political is because they speak to those realities—namely, sex/gender norms—that are taken for granted, rather than investigated, explored, and confronted. We are enmeshed, following from Stuart Hall, in ideologies that work well because they are hidden, and the greatest, most foundational of these is the acceptance of heteronormativity as a given.¹⁴ The healthy skepticism that surrounds assertions of sexuality, in part because of the fragmentary nature of the archive and the requirement to read-against-the-grain, too often bleed into a style of criticism that is not as pronounced when dealing with other categories, and scholars who take on sexuality research are accused of reading their own subjectivities into the past, although this claim could be made about anyone. Sexuality and homosexuality *are* subjects of history and historiography; it is just that the field of history itself is more accustomed to focusing on other priorities as the primary drivers in human civilization, even when dealing on the levels allowed

¹⁴ Stuart Hall, “The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist ideologies and the Media,” in *Gender, Race and Class in Media*, ed. Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), 18-22.

for by social and cultural history. This dissertation shows what happens when we start questioning the heteronormative ideology and queering it.

Indeed, historians should have much to say on sexuality, largely because the meticulous research required to produce a history often complicates the theories produced in other fields. My project developed in large part due to my own frustration that sexuality was unfairly dismissed as secondary at best for historical inquiry, particularly in the field of Latin American history. In the cases when sexuality was discussed, it was often made subservient to, rather than mutually constitutive of, gender; doing so limited the inquiries that could be made into the emotions, affectations, and desires that individuals felt and how those influenced the course of public sphere realities, particularly with regards to social norms, education, politics, and criminology. Incorporating sexuality as a major frame of analysis allows a researcher to showcase the experiences of groups and individuals previously underserved by mainstream history, and it also problematizes the normative assumptions about family, reproduction, and social hierarchies that are taken for granted. In addition, sexuality as a frame illuminates how societies have organized on the basis of fearing sex/gender difference and the queer “other”.

Any assertion that sexuality was insignificant in Mexican history pales in the face of historical evidence that I have marshaled in the following chapters. By writing a history of Mexican male homosexuality, I am, in effect, challenging paradigms that limit sexuality to a historical sideshow. At the same time, I am asserting that history *must* be a component of queer research because too often theory is presentist and disconnected from historical experiences. I thus answer Lisa Duggan’s call for history to inform queer theory and vice versa.¹⁵

¹⁵ Lisa Duggan, “The Discipline Problem: Queer Theory Meets Lesbian and Gay History,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 2, no. 3 (1995): 179-191.

I take on this task, however, cognizant of my own positionality. As a white male from a wealthy nation, I have benefited from resources that some of my counterparts have not, so my criticism of previous scholarship should be tempered with the acknowledgement of my own fortunate position as someone who could devote years searching for the minutiae that, in aggregate, challenge notions that seem reasonable at first glance. Moreover, my status as an outsider has allowed me opportunities to conduct research without being overly influenced by the myths above, even as the privilege I wield can limit my insights into some nuances of this work. My solution has been to offer this project and its subsequent incarnations as an invitation to a larger conversation, as an opportunity to address the many errors, inconsistencies, omissions in the historical record, while also respecting the previous work that has made my own possible.

II. What's in a Number? The (In)famous Number "41" in Mexican History

"In Mexico the number 41 has no value and is offensive to Mexicans."

*General Francisco Urquiza*¹⁶

On the January 2, 1941 cover of Mexican magazine *Jueves de Excelsior*, an image by artist Ernesto Garcia Cabral appeared depicting a Mexican dandy *afeminado*. During the twentieth century, *afeminados*—who were known to indulge their desires for fashion, fine goods, and aesthetic beauty—were the most conspicuous homosexuals in Mexican society. Many types existed, but the most prominent were the cross-dressing male—who appeared in feminine attire and makeup—and the ostentatious dandy—often referred to as a *señorito*—whose devotion to the cult of his own beauty was deemed unmasculine.¹⁷ What made this cover portrayal of a

¹⁶ Francisco L Urquiza, *Símbolos y números*, 1st ed. (México: B. Costa-Amic, 1965), 67.

¹⁷ The term *señorito* literally means "little man" and is the male counterpart to *señorita*, while also frequently suggesting that the man is not masculine and/or has homosexual tendencies. Other terms, like *lagartijo* and *fifi* at times also denoted a homosexual, but none of the three were exclusively used for that purpose. They instead overlapped with heterosexual men who also indulged in such consumption and style and who were seen as less-masculine by critics.

dandy clearly a reference to homosexuality was his outfit: a tight-fitting, high-waisted pale grey suit, white gloves, a lime green shirt, turquoise bow-tie, pink handkerchief, small hat, lavender-toed white shoes, and a pink vest labeled with the number “1941”. In one hand, he carried a red rose, and in the other, a gentleman’s cane. His eyes were darkened with mascara and highlighted with turquoise eye shadow; his lips were reddened with lipstick. A trimmed, thin mustache completed the look. Finally the *señorito* was posed with a jaunty stance, staring upwards coquettishly.¹⁸

Cabral’s cover thus portrayed the stereotype of a homosexual dandy as the readers of *Jueves de Excelsior*, a prominent, high-circulation magazine, would have expected. Such men were easily recognizable due to their own self-presentation—that combined conspicuous consumption, bright colors, and foreign styles—and the way they had been represented in the press.¹⁹ One of these men was Salvador Novo, one of Mexico’s most famous writers.²⁰ Such men made up part of the queer social fabric of Mexico City and other urban centers in the country as early as the last decades of the nineteenth century. Public knowledge of these men, as Chapter 1 details, existed even earlier, stretching back to the colonial period.

However, it was an event in November 1901 that formally and irrevocably thrust queer sexualities—and the men who practiced them, developed identities that incorporated such behaviors, and crafted communities that were at least in part based on such identities—into the public sphere. This event, referenced by the number “1941” on the dandy’s pink vest, certified the dandy as a queer male. On November 17, 1901, police raided a clandestine party in a private

¹⁸ Ernesto García Cabral, “Cover”, *Jueves de Excelsior*, January 2, 1941. Cabral was famous for his movie posters and caricatures which graced several magazines.

¹⁹ Moisés González Navarro, *Historia moderna de México*, vol. IV, *La vida social* (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Hermes, 1957), 410.

²⁰ Salvador Novo, *La estatua de sal* (Mexico: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1998), 73. Novo’s diary forms one of the key sources for this project and is about his experiences as a youth and young man. The “salted world” is a reference to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah.

home on La Paz street (presently calle Ezequiel Montes, just a block from the Monumento de la Revolución) in which 41 (possibly 42) men danced together, half in drag.²¹ This event, and the number “41” under which it was remembered, would become synonymous with homosexuality. The resulting scandal was splashed across the public sphere in news articles, ballads, and broadsheet engravings for weeks. Indeed, the stereotypes produced and amplified by the press would reverberate through Mexican society for decades, shaping discourses on queer sexualities, their expression, and their repression, as well as on citizenship and national identity.²²

Famous Mexican chronicler Carlos Monsiváis asserted that the event—known afterwards as the scandal of the Famous 41—invented homosexuality in Mexico.²³ Thereafter, queer men were marked by the number as part of the homosexual “tribe”, yet they simultaneously were able to recognize shared experiences and begin forming collective identities and communities that, at times, extended across class, race, and gender-normative lines. This dual process—of queer sexualities becoming important discursively in Mexican society and the development of individual and collective identities among queer men themselves—would shape Mexican society for the rest of the century, tying the development of the Mexican nation and ideas of citizenship, civil rights, and cultural authenticity to sexuality. As cultural studies scholar Robert McKee Irwin has asserted, the Famous 41 ball “scandalously joined together in the public imagination transvestites, libertines, the sexually curious, and all kinds of horny Mexicans of all social

²¹ Early reports on the event, such as one on November 20, 1901, claimed there were 42 men present. See “Un baile clandestino sorprendido: 42 hombres aprendidos, unos vestidos de mujeres,” *El Popular*, November 20, 1901. This article was reprinted in Robert McKee Irwin, Ed McCaughan, and Michelle Rocio Nasser, *The Famous 41: Sexuality and Social Control in Mexico, 1901* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 36. Rumor has long held that the forty-second individual was none other than Ignacio de la Torre, son-in-law of dictator Porfirio Díaz. See Carlos Monsiváis, “Los iguales, los semejantes, los (hasta hace un minuto) perfectos desconocidos (A cien años de la Redada de los 41),” *Debate Feminista* 12, no. 24 (October 2001): 301-327. Irwin discusses other rumors in Robert McKee Irwin, “The Centenary of the Famous 41,” in *The Famous 41: Sexuality and Social Control in Mexico, 1901*, ed. Robert McKee Irwin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 170-171.

²² A fine collection of the articles describing the scandal has been reprinted both in Spanish and English translation in Irwin, McCaughan, and Rocio Nasser, *The Famous 41*.

²³ Monsiváis, “The 41 and the Gran Redada,” 164.

classes under the sign of the 41.” It was also a ‘ball that launched the explosion not simply of a repressive discourse but of a dissonance of discourses, many of which were self-contradictory.’” In other words, more than just queer men were marked by the sign of the 41; all Mexicans, even if they defined themselves *against* the queer other—as symbolized by the number 41—still were marked by that same number, and as I describe below, took pains to disassociate themselves with it. Negation this mark, therefore, recognized the queer periphery and made it central to the definition of Mexican identity, if unintentionally.

While many have written about the Famous 41 event, no history has fully explored the queer cultures in which the event was but one famous example, nor the consequences the event had on *afeminados* and discourses on (homo)sexuality in the twentieth century, particularly as related to citizenship. Likewise, the origins of the *ambiente* and Mexican homosexual identities have not been traced across the *longue durée* of Mexican modernity, either in the lead up to the Revolution or its aftermath.²⁴ This dissertation, “‘Estamos en Todas Partes’: Male Homosexuality, Nation, and Modernity in Twentieth Century Mexico”, the first large-scale history of its kind, takes on these challenges. I focus on two interrelated objectives: first, to reconstruct the lived experiences of queer Mexican men, and, second, to interrogate how the effeminate, homosexual male became not only a popular cultural foil, but also a crucial “other” against which Mexican national identity—as exemplified by the masculine patriarch—could be defined. I thus examine Mexican queer sexuality in two registers: as a social historical formation

²⁴ Several authors, including Irwin and Monsiváis, as well as Robert Buffington, Victor Macías-González, Pablo Piccato, Sylvia Molloy, and Cristina Rivera-Garza, contributed essays on the Famous 41 and/or sexuality in *fin-de-siècle* Mexican society to the excellent collection *The Famous 41* as part of a centenary celebration of the scandal. See Irwin, McCaughan, and Rocio Nasser, *The Famous 41*. Monsiváis also described the event in several of his articles on queer men, many of which were reprinted in collected form in 2010. See Monsiváis, *Que se abre esa puerta*. Irwin also devotes some time to the subject in his book *Mexican Masculinities*, which unpacks the complicated terrain of Mexican sex/gender/sexuality norms. See Irwin, *Mexican Masculinities*. Ben Sifuentes-Jauregui also writes about the event in his investigation of transvestism in Mexican society, particularly in chapter 1. See Sifuentes-Jauregui, *Transvestism, Masculinity, and Latin America Literature*.

of queer male identities and communities, and as a cultural historical articulation of Mexican national identity. Indeed, the very category of “queer Mexican (man),” created as a pathology by social reformers, medical experts, and jurists, was foundational to the *longue durée* of political debates on citizenship and civil rights, first as an excluded “other” due to the alliance between nationalism and heterosexism in Mexican society, then gradually over time as an unfairly maligned minority group making legitimate claims for social, cultural, and political status.

Through this dual social and cultural historical approach, I assert that in order to have a comprehensive understanding of sexuality in Mexico—or any society, for that matter—the experiences of queer individuals and groups must be situated within larger societal discourses, frameworks of power, and material realities, particularly as all three intersect with concerns about sex/gender norms. Likewise, it is impossible to truly understand what it meant to be a citizen or to be a “real man” without exploring the minority groups who were excluded from either description and who were required as negative foils in order to delineate status in society.²⁵

Such discursive formations in Mexico frequently incorporated notions of sexuality and gender, particularly as they related to the creation or maintenance of desirable (male) citizens. One example is the paradox of the urban/rural split: while cities were sites of modernity, they were also sites of degeneration; even though the rural areas were potential sites of backward traditions, they were also places of potential rehabilitation. A city would “feminize” a man, making him “weak” and vulnerable to the predations of queer men or degeneration into their vice, while work in the fresh, rural air would make him masculine.²⁶ Cities were also sites of

²⁵ Emilio Bejel makes a similar argument about the position of homosexuals in Cuban society and discourses on the Cuban nation. See Bejel, *Gay Cuban Nation*, xv.

²⁶ Of course, such effects were not believed to be present in everyone living in the countryside or in smaller locations than a major city; the indigenous, for example, were often criticized as effeminate as well, despite their more rural dwellings

disease and contamination, vectors where foreign customs and ideas could threaten the nation.

Take this example from poet Efraín Huerta's description of Mexico City in 1937:

We declare to you our hate, magnificent city.
To you, to your sadnesses and bourgeois vulgarisms,
to your girls of the air, caramels, and American films,
to your *ice cream* youth (*juventudes*) stuffed with garbage,
to your rampant *maricones* that devastate the schools, the Plaza Garibaldi,
and the vivid and venomous Calle de San Juan de Letrán.²⁷

That is, Mexico City was a site of decadence, foreign influence, empty pleasures, garbage, and dangerous, invading homosexuals. In contrast, the countryside, such as touted in government newspaper *El Nacional* and numerous other sources, was a place of health; this is why one of the grandest penal experiments conducted by the Mexican government—the Islas Marías penal colony—was sited far away from the capital.²⁸ “Authenticity”—in the sense of speaking to the essence of *lo mexicano* (i.e., what it was to be Mexican)—was located at the intersection of multiple discourses, of which the city/rural divide was one and the national/transnational divide was another. This is why I examine Mexico City, and to a lesser extent other urban centers, as well as the Islas Marías penal colony, as the search for “authenticity” would be played out along scales of the local, national, and transnational in each of these sites.

In the following chapters, I explore three interrelated spheres: (1) individual and collective histories of queer Mexicans, including nightlife, friendships, language codes, cruising patterns, community development, and resistance to repression in urban centers, especially Mexico City; (2) the genealogy of “virile” citizenship and how homosexuals were excluded from it by virtue of both gender and sexual norms; and (3) the ways in which queer lives intersected with homophobic, heteronormative discourses associated with national development that labeled

²⁷ Efraín Huerta, “Declaración de odio,” in *Poesía completa* (Mexico, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1988), 104.

²⁸ “La escuela al aire libre y sus magníficos resultados en el campo de la educación,” *El Nacional*, November 20, 1932. See Chapter 5.

queer men as deviant foils against which Mexican national identity could be defined.

Homosexuality was a key concern both *in* the formation of national identity, cultural icons, and ideologies that had far-reaching consequences, as well as *for* cultural, political, and medical-juridical authorities seeking to fashion Mexican modernity. More importantly, understanding the development of Mexican modernity *requires* an investigation of homosexuality. Through the lens of homosexuality, the convergences between the local, national, and transnational—which often occurred in discourses on homosexuals and future citizenship (that were gendered and heteronormativized) and manifested in spaces in the *ambiente* (such as a neighborhood bar)—are made clear. These convergences call into question any uniform notion of the Mexican nation and complicate the ways in which Mexican identity has been rendered philosophically, such as by writers like Samuel Ramos and Octavio Paz, as well as social scientists seeking to define “authentic” Mexican sexualities. This I take up in Chapter 6.

This dissertation is not just a history of elites such as Salvador Novo and his friends in the group of artists and writers known as the Contemporáneos who have long made up the majority of historical examples for homosexuality in Mexico. Indeed, a key innovation of my project has to merge “bottom up” social history with accounts of elites and then juxtapose these with the discursive analysis that cultural historical approaches enable. In turn, I use cultural history to facilitate the excavation of richer “histories from below” than would be possible using only the scant materials produced by subalterns. Several chapters rely on documents and examples describing working-class cultures that have not been previously described in academic literature. In this way, official sources—such as criminal case files and medical evaluations—as well as those produced by the press and elites can be mined for their queer content, for the glimpses they can provide of homosexuals’ experiences, and for the insights they offer on how

sexual deviancy was understood, disciplined, and at times tolerated by the larger society. The payoff is a more sophisticated analysis than either social or cultural historical methodology alone could provide, one that elucidates the intricate interplay between mutually constitutive lived experiences and cultural discourses at the scales of the individual, of groups, of the city, the nation, and transnational contact zones.

III. Chapters

Chapter 1 investigates how sodomy and male effeminacy were condensed into the same discursive and identity spaces during the nineteenth century. While some scholars have claimed that there was silence on homosexuality in the period, I show instead that sodomy and male effeminacy were linked, if not as much as they would become after 1901, and that discourses on both were important to evolving understandings of nationhood and citizenship in Mexico that would impact the twentieth century. With the decriminalization of sodomy in 1871 and the emergence of “modern” types like the literary character Chucho el Ninfo, authorities sought new ways to police the Mexican public’s sexuality, settling on “outrages against public morality” as a catch-all for deviance and a model for making homosexuals criminally legible. While it may have been a compromise between liberals seeking to eliminate arbitrary laws and conservatives seeking to preserve the moral status quo, it enabled police and social reformers to exploit this legal limbo, stoke negative public opinion, and target homosexuals for punishment.

Chapter 2 offers several views on how homosexuality was understood and experienced from the fin-de-siècle until 1920. I describe the high-society drag balls that were part of Porfirian modernity that the Revolution would come to reject, the emerging public sphere discourses on male effeminacy and homosexuality as definitively anti-Mexican, the roundups that were used to enforce normativity after the 1901 scandal, and the pleasures and perils that homosexual men

faced in urban centers as they cruised in public. I argue that transvestism was a crucial plank in both homosexual identity and discourses on national identity and that it became a symbol of homosexual resistance and of the threat Mexican masculinity faced under the Porfiriato. In sum, there was little space for queer behaviors after 1901 because transvestism, homosexuality, and male effeminacy were packaged with criticism of Porfirian modernity, meaning they could not and were not incorporated into later national discourses, except through their negation.

Chapter 3 is the first of three chapters on the post-revolutionary period from 1920-1940. This was a crucial period in the definition of Mexican identity and nation, and at its core were efforts to enshrine virile citizenship as the key component of both. In sexology, criminology, youth reform, parental advice columns, and the public sphere, concerns over creating useful citizens prevailed, helping to codify homosexual deviance as foreign, socially dangerous, and anti-Mexican. Yet, this was also a period of growing visibility for the homosexual community, and it marked the emergence of alternatives to virile citizenship, most notably the Contemporáneos group, who would bear the brunt of homophobic criticism in the public sphere. Of particular interest in the chapter are Mexican youths, who as future citizens, became intensely studied as the state increased its power to exert influence over Mexican morality and sexual practices. The irony, though, was that although Mexico aspired to national exceptionalism, it incorporated “universal” ideas of criminology and sexology in its “reforms” of youths and transnational physical culture in its delineation of the post-revolutionary restored male body.

Chapter 4 offers the other side of these issues by looking at how the Contemporáneos incorporated the transnational into their experiences, while also articulating alternative masculinities and nationalisms; how *afeminados* contested their status in society; and how red-light districts were important zones of convergence between classes, the nation, transnational

cultures, and homosexuality. It also explores the expansion of the *ambiente* in that period as well as the sort of lives that homosexuals lived when brought under state authority through the penal system. These examples show how citizenship and masculinity were contested by those who were deemed unfit for both in ways that complicated the smooth adoption of virile citizenship as normative. Homosexuality flourished in public, in prison, and even in the upper echelon's of the Mexican government itself, and the male body acquired significance—such as beauty—that could be appropriated by homosexuals for aims that queered the national project.

Chapter 5 focuses on the Islas Márias penal colony from 1929–1950, a social experiment in which criminals, communists, Catholics, and queers were sent to an island 60 miles from the shore to be reformed in the rural, open air. It provides a history of how relegation to the colony occurred, the roundups undertaken to net homosexuals for relegation, and the development of a homosexual community at the colony. Indeed, if the penal colony was intended to remove homosexuality from the capital and rehabilitate the men who practiced it, the colony instead offered a site where queer identities and community could be intensely and intimately fostered. It also served as a site of identity formation where *afeminados* began to delineate themselves as separate from the criminals with whom they had been consigned to the “tomb of the Pacific.” This marked an early stage in the development of militant homosexual identities.

Chapter 6 explores the apex of state authority over sexuality. I begin with the theories of Mexican identity that developed between 1940 and 1960 and that depended on virile citizenship as the opposite of homosexuality in order to help stabilize the broad-based coalition on which the governing PRI party rested its authority. I also show that masculinity remained contested, even as the PRI attempted to incorporate alternatives—such as expressed by the *exóticos* in Mexican wrestling—into its nationalist vision. I also show how “cures” for homosexuality were proposed

and implemented, the most serious of which was sex-reassignment surgery. Such cures were needed because previous efforts to excise or reform homosexuals had failed. I conclude with the climax of state aggression against homosexuals as manifested in September 1959 in the wake of a pair of brutal murders. It was in this period that Mexico sought to definitively define citizenship in nationalist, virile, anti-imperialist, xenophobic, and homophobic ways, and it was then that the state and its proxies in the public sphere came the closest to achieving this goal.

They eventually did fail, however, and Chapter 7 shows the origins of why. Between 1940-1960, the *ambiente* entered a “golden age” in which it expanded as never before and linked individuals across classes, national borders, and ideological barriers. Even as working-class men were made into emblems of imagined “authenticity” for the Mexican regime by middle-class theorists, these men important progenitors of the *ambiente*’s growth. Though the 1959 murders would end this golden age, it nevertheless sowed the seeds of future homosexual identity and resistance, as homosexuality was ever more directly injected into the nation’s social fabric.

As a whole, these chapters show the need for this investigation of homosexuality, and the fruitful history it uncovered on how Mexican citizenship was defined, experienced, and contested in the twentieth century. They also queer the received view that Mexico was “behind” the West in terms of homosexuality—whether in discourse or identity—and instead show that from the beginning of the national process, and especially after the Revolution, homosexuality was a carrier of meaning for Mexican nationalism, just as it was for those in the *ambiente*, even as those meanings were distinct.

IV. Theoretics, How is Mexico Distinct, and Cities as the Study Site

French theorist Michel Foucault famously argued that homosexuals emerged by the fin-de-siècle as a “species” in contrast to the sodomite who displayed only aberrant behaviors in earlier

times.²⁹ As chapters 1 and 2 discuss, there were indeed changing understandings of sodomy in criminological, legal, and medical terms at that time in Mexico, including a transition from sodomy as a sinful behavior to pederasty as a characteristic of a particular type. But these were only some of the overlapping, at times mutually reinforcing and at times competing ideas, that emanated from multiple sites: the state, popular voices in the penny press, middle-class social reformers, and cultural producers, just to name four. Like historians George Chauncey and Margo Canaday accomplished in their own works, I argue that what constituted “perversion” at the turn-of-the-century was, in Canaday’s terms, a “fuzzy category” contested on multiple fronts.³⁰ Indeed, rather than a fully defined “species,” homosexuals were enmeshed in debates that, while usually negative towards them, were not necessarily unified in their perspectives, which allowed the possibility of not only repression, but also tolerance.

That said, as the twentieth century continued, the various competing strains of what David Halperin has called the four “prehomosexual categories of male sex”—effeminacy, pederasty/“active” sodomy, friendship/intimacy between men, and passivity or inversion—converged together more fully around a fifth category, the homosexual “type.” Homosexuality, then was “an effect of this cumulative process of historical overlay and accretion.”³¹ Thus, these previous categories were not so much *superseded* by the homosexual type but instead coexisted with it and were incorporated into it, albeit with different aims and levels of success by various social, political, and cultural actors, including homosexuals themselves.³² This process, I argue,

²⁹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 43.

³⁰ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 27; Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 11.

³¹ David M. Halperin, “How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 6, no. 1 (2000): 91-92.

³² Halperin draws on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s notion of “irreducible incoherence” between and “unrationalized coexistence of different models” of gender and sexuality in simultaneous operation in the modern period. See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 85.

mirrored, shaped, and was shaped by the coalescing perspectives on Mexican citizenship and masculinity, as well as how both were mutually constitutive. The productive tension between both processes would be instrumental in forging *lo mexicano*.

Foucault's intervention that modernity entailed a multiplication of aberrant sexualities, rather than the effective repression of sexuality, is then a useful frame for understanding the persistence and pervasive amplification of the homosexual social world during the twentieth century, even as the state grew stronger.³³ This is not to say that repression did not occur; indeed, the story of how alliances between the Mexican state, political actors, criminologists, institutions, cultural figures, and medical doctors attempted to root out homosexuals, relegate them from the body politic and urban centers, "reform" them in state facilities, or excoriate them in the public sphere form a significant axis upon which this dissertation turns. However, I also argue that despite attempts by the state to codify what homosexuality was, what masculinity was, and what citizenship was, these remained contested across a variety of social, political, and cultural spheres, from transnational webs of consumption to national and local political agendas to the everyday lives of homosexuals themselves.

While Mexico mirrored the processes described by Canaday, it did so only to a point. Like the United States, the Mexican state developed and matured at the same time—and in dialogue with—developing scientific and popular notions of what homosexuality was. However, because homosexual sex was legal in much of the country after 1871—insofar as sodomy had been decriminalized at the federal level—and homosexual activities were unevenly prosecuted through the unwieldy categories of *ultrajes a la moral pública* (outrages against public morality), this allowed more space for homosexuals to express themselves publicly and even to be complicit members of administrations that were developing both the nation and what *lo*

³³ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 49.

mexicano was and how it would service the aims of that maturing nation. This ambiguous status also helps explain the times in which tolerance, rather than repression, constituted the Mexican response to homosexuality, as most notably found in the 1930s at the Islas Marías penal colony, which, ironically, had been the depot to which homosexuals from Mexican urban centers had been relegated. In addition, it points to an alternative relationship between the Mexican state and homosexuals than occurred in the United States, one marked more about the debate on what it meant to be a citizen than it was by the sort of effective, institutionalized homophobia found in the United States, even as repression was frequently a Mexican state aim.³⁴

Studying Mexico through Urban Homosexuality

Most scholarly work on homosexuality has looked to cities as research sites, given the central role that many of these played in allowing spaces for identities and communities to form. This by no means is to say that cities were the *only* sites of homosexuality or the sole locations where it was debated or experienced. Doing so provincializes experiences outside metropolises, which is a disservice because Mexico (like much of the world) has been provincialized in larger debates on sexuality that favor experiences in the United States and Europe that serve as metropolises in their own right discursively and in the academy.³⁵

³⁴ Canaday, *The Straight State*, 9. If at any time Mexico approached the “hard and clear line” that appeared in the United States by midcentury between the citizen and the pervert, as Canaday argued, it was in the same period. As the state matured during and after World War II, the state and its supporters in cultural and political spheres actively linked homosexuality and foreignness together, and by the 1950s, Mexican authorities invested new resources in rooting out vice and social problems, of which homosexuality was considered one of the most grave. However, open homosexuals remained important in the upper echelons of Mexican politics and culture.

³⁵ This has occurred even as countertrends emerged in studies of globalization, race, and sexuality; indeed, studies of globalization can still unintentionally privilege that which they seek to undermine, that is, the primacy of Western (white, often male) experience and locations. However, important interventions have sought to question the primacy of cities, nation states, empires, and older methods of approaching sexuality that privileged the West. See for example Cindy Patton and Benigno Sánchez-Eppler, eds., *Queer Diasporas* (Durham, N.C.: Duke, 2000); Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin F. Manalansan IV, eds., *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

Yet, cities remain important sites for exploring the changing understandings and expressions of homosexuality, masculinity, citizenship, and nationhood. As Julie Abraham has argued, both homosexuality and cities share a common name—Sodom—and “to denounce the city is still to denounce homosexuality, and to denounce homosexuality is still to denounce the city.”³⁶ Indeed, “...homosexuals became, over the course of the past two centuries, simultaneously model citizens of the modern city and avatars of the urban; that is, models of the city itself.”³⁷ It should be no surprise that the city, which was both the capital of modernity and a vector for “contamination”—as described above—was the site in which homosexuality converged with local concerns, national debates, and transnational flows. Homosexuality, then, is critical for understanding processes of modernity, as modernity found much of its fullest expression in urban centers, and homosexuality helps illuminate the shifts from a nation based on rural areas to one marked by burgeoning cities and industrial spaces within a global economy.

While most Mexicans would continue living in rural areas until past the middle of the century, the processes that would mark Mexican nation-building and citizenship were frequently contested in cities, particularly but not limited to the capital. Thus, the scandal of 1901 represents more than a shift where homosexuality became legible as a “problem” in Mexican society. It represents the moment in which multiple understandings of sex/gender deviance first formally converged with ideas of nation and citizenship—and who was legible and illegible as participants in both—within an urban context. The Famous 41 scandal thus marked the opening salvo of the social, political, and cultural shifts and debates that would follow, as well as the first time that one of the central axes on which debates on nation and citizenship would turn—found at the convergence of masculinity and homosexuality—was articulated on a scale that would

³⁶ Julie Abraham, *Metropolitan Lovers: The Homosexuality of Cities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), xiv.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, xvii, xix.

continue reverberating in Mexican society. This dissertation is the story of what happened thereafter, at the levels of individual lives and the discourses on homosexuality in city neighborhoods, the nation, and within larger frameworks of transnational modernity.

Section I Introduction: (Homo)Sexuality and Nineteenth Century Mexico

This section investigates the ways in which homosexuality was understood and experienced prior to and during the Mexican Revolution. In the century following independence, Mexico endured numerous political and cultural changes, as well as foreign invasions. These influenced the discursive frames through which Mexican nationhood, masculinity, honor, and sexuality would be understood, especially by the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. Fears of the foreign and criticism of decadence and excess would figure in these frames, not only with regards to politics or cultural norms, but also in relation to ideas of gender and sexuality.

This section is a preliminary effort to close the large gap between studies of gender and sexuality during the colonial period (roughly to the 1820s) and in the post-revolutionary period. It seeks to show the origins of important discourses—such as those about virile citizenship and the veneration of the working-class as “authentic”—as they were and became ever more intertwined with emerging definitions of sexuality as marking “types” rather than simply aberrant behavior. Thus while not as developed as Sections II and III, this section nevertheless offers important glimpses into the discursive genealogies of sexuality, gender, and politics as they became ever more mutually constitutive by the Revolution in 1910. Indeed, I contend that the Famous 41 scandal in 1901 was an early event within a larger revolutionary era, as it marked a clear moment when nation and citizenship were defined against homosexual others who, after the processes of the nineteenth century, were recognized by a number of traits, including gender deviance / cross-dressing and sodomy.

Importantly, this period also featured the decriminalization of sodomy in 1871, leading to a more convoluted system of punishing homosexuality through claims of “moral outrages.” How these charges were applied and prosecuted spoke to how sexuality threatened the stability of separations between the private and public spheres, as well as the blurry lines between using

gender and sexuality as weapons against political or social opponents and being marked by them in turn in inauthentic or dangerous ways.

Chapter 1 looks at examples from the press, literary sources, linguistic changes, and case files to explore how discourses on gender norms and sexuality converged with citizenship and nation, particularly after 1871. I argue that 1901 was thus not a fluke, but rather the culmination of a series of trajectories that intersected at a time of social, political, and cultural tensions during the late Porfiriato, most notably between the elites and disaffected members of the middle and lower-classes. Chapter 1 is one part of an exploration of Mexican modernity as it formed, in part, in relation to sexuality.

Chapter 2 looks at how transvestism, which had a cultural and social role prior to 1901 among elites and in the homosexual community, became associated with anti-Mexican status. It also explores how attempts were made to codify masculinity and virile citizenship vis-à-vis other political statuses and types of modernity, including that espoused by effeminate homosexuals. It concludes with social historical explorations of queer life prior to 1920 in the capital and other urban centers. I argue that homosexuality was not simply a concern in the capital, but instead permeated cultural and political discourses found throughout the country and that the Revolution did not so much change these discourses as amplify them and set them in starker relief.

Chapter 1: From Sodomy to Pederasty to Moral Outrages: Mexican Homosexuality in the Nineteenth Century

This introductory chapter deviates from the format of the remainder of chapters, which are largely bounded by twenty-year periods. In contrast, this chapter incorporates both a chronological investigation of sodomy and how its meaning and how it was understood changed over time. It also extends past the nineteenth century in order to show the changes in the Penal Codes that would be important in later decades, and it includes a case study on a literary source as contextualized in both nineteenth and twentieth century sources. I do this in order to bridge between the theoretical explorations begun in the Introduction and the social and cultural histories that follow, as well as to more rapidly cover historiographical and methodological ground in order to set up the following chapters. Many of the examples and themes discussed here would reappear in some form later in the twentieth century; as such, it is necessary to play with a more mutable temporal framework here so as to model the ways in which genealogies of homosexuality—as a discourse and experience—became ever more present after 1900.

This chapter first looks at the “gap” in scholarship on same-sex sexuality in the nineteenth century, then challenges assertions based on a seeming lack of sources that demonstrate such sexuality by providing evidence from case files and the press.¹ Second, I provide a genealogy of sodomy in the 1800s and show how it was not absent from discussions of gender and decadence in the period as has been previously claimed. Third, I explore the changing penal codes—1871, 1929, and 1931—that decriminalized sodomy and led homosexuality to be punished under charges of “moral outrages” and “corruption of minors.” Fourth, I present the case study of *Historia de Chucho el Ninfo*, a novel that foreshadowed the great debates on virility, sexuality, nation, and citizenship during the twentieth century; this is

¹ While this period was not my main area of focus, it was not difficult using the tools available to the contemporary researcher to obtain these sources. This remains, however, a preliminary survey.

followed by a brief look at political cartoons and male homosociality. I close with changes in linguistic patterns by the end of the period. I contend that the origins of these debates can be traced to the ways in which sodomy was understood in the nineteenth century, as well as to the anxieties over masculinity that shaped public discourse on what comprised the nation and citizenship. Indeed, while the “birth” of homosexuality may have occurred in 1901, it did not occur spontaneously, and prior to that date, alternative models of nation and masculinity were possible that were foreclosed thereafter.

I. The “Problem” of Homosexuality in the Nineteenth Century

The title of this section might, at first glance, appear silly, as same-sex sexuality has been known to exist for millennia. However, for the researcher of twentieth century Mexican queer sexualities, referencing queer sexual behaviors, practices, communities, and identities (should they have existed) in the nineteenth century poses a distinct challenge. This is due to the lack of historical scholarship on the period that deals meaningfully with the subject and obvious primary sources in which such information could be found. This means that the origins, genealogies, and developmental trajectories of twentieth century queer Mexican sexualities cannot be easily traced. Nor can the legitimate sex/gender legacies of the colonial period be traced through the nineteenth century. An example: during the 1600s and 1700s, communities of men who sought sex with other men, i.e., sodomitical subcultures, existed in many urban and rural areas in Mexico.² What became of these communities during the final stages of the colonial period, during independence, and during the tumultuous decades that followed? This question takes on

² See for example the arguments made in Zeb Tortorici, “‘Heran Todos Putos:’ Sodomitical Subcultures and Disordered Desire in Early Colonial Mexico,” *Ethnohistory* 54, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 35-67. Another example: the word *puto* was used for a man who engaged in sex with other men during the colonial period; it meant the same in the twentieth century. We can assume that the term was always used in this manner, but we cannot be certain, nor can the nuances of usage—the waxing and waning of the term’s popularity, the changes-over-time in how it was deployed and against whom—be taken for granted.

more importance when considered against the backdrop of the waning influence of the Inquisition and the Catholic Church over matters of sexual crimes and the nascent state of secular, governmental concern in such matters.

Two answers exist in scholarship: either the nineteenth century lacks any engagement with sodomy or it is merely a largely undifferentiated conduit through which colonial legacies passed unchanged to the twentieth century in the form of “Latino-Mediterranean” sexual hierarchies. In the first case, Martin Nesvig has labeled the years from 1700-1870 as “the Void”, a period in which references to sexual crimes diminished significantly in comparison to their frequency in the colonial period.³ Indeed, tracing the shifts between sodomy and the *pecado nefando* (abominable sin) to modern understandings of homosexuality proves difficult without such references, and scholars are left relying on models from other nations, particularly the queer experiences of individuals and groups in Europe and the United States. The only significant historical work on sodomy in Mexico in the (early) nineteenth century is found in Lee Penyak’s 1993 dissertation “Criminal Sexuality in Central Mexico”, which included a chapter focused on sodomy, bestiality, and deviant female sexuality.⁴ This book, however, has not been published; thus it remains relatively unknown, both in Mexico and in the American academy.

Both Penyak and Nesvig articulated methods for understanding the period’s sexuality, as well as illuminated archival sources, including civil court records, Inquisition records, and confessional manuals, among others. Most of their sources, however, are from the late colonial period, rather than after independence. A number of questions remain. What became of colonial understandings of sexuality during the period between 1820 and 1870? What influence, if any,

³ Martin Nesvig, “The Complicated Terrain of Latin American Homosexuality,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 81, no. 3-4 (2001): 710.

⁴ Lee Michael Penyak, “Criminal Sexuality in Central Mexico, 1750-1850” (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Connecticut, 1993).

did changing understandings of sexuality in Europe have on Mexican understandings of the same? What were the punishments for sexual deviance, and how did these change over time? Were there communities between men, and “sodomitical subcultures” such as scholars like Serge Gruzinski and Zeb Tortorici claimed existed in the mid-to-late colonial period?⁵ And, how did changes in political culture impact understandings of same-sex sexuality and those who practiced it, particularly as politicians, pundits, and the press debated citizenship and how to stitch the diverse regions of what is now Mexico into a more cohesive union?

The lack of studies and primary resources has led some thinkers and scholars to conclude that sodomy was in fact not openly discussed, whether in literature or elsewhere, and was only referenced obliquely, if at all, due to its status as the “love which dare not speak its’ name”. Carlos Monsiváis in a 1997 article argued that homosexuality was “unthinkable” in Mexico during the nineteenth century, basing his observation on the absence of laws and regulations concerned with such activities, as well as the “inexistence of articles, literary personalities, and...caricatured representations of gay people.”⁶ Indeed, as he observed in 1995,

If during the viceroyalty sodomites were condemned to be burnt at the stake because they ‘changed the natural order’, in the nineteenth century they are never mentioned in writing, and as such an important event such as the judgment of Oscar Wilde (1895) did not receive commentaries in the press.⁷

⁵ See Serge Gruzinski, “Las cenizas del deseo: Homosexuales novohispanos a mediados del siglo XVII,” in *De la santidad a la perversión, o de porqué no se cumplía la ley de Dios en la sociedad novohispana*, ed. Sergio Ortega (Mexico City, 1985). Gruzinski’s work was groundbreaking for its assertion that the cases of sodomy were not isolated events, but demonstrated a clandestine community of men who sought other men for sex, a subculture with its own “secret geography” and its own “network of information and informants,” as well as its own “language and codes.” Gruzinski limits this to the larger cities of Mexico City and Puebla, but in an excellent article Tortorici found evidence of “sodomitical subcultures” in other locations, including Valladolid (now Morelia), as well as rural areas. See Tortorici, “‘Heran Todos Putos’.” Penyak claimed that such communities did not exist for the period he studied; however, Tortorici and others have demonstrated that such communities and subcultures likely did exist.

⁶ Carlos Monsiváis, “Los que tenemos unas manos que no nos pertenecen? (A propósito de lo queer y lo raro),” in *Que se abra esa puerta: Crónicas y ensayos sobre la diversidad sexual* (Mexico, D.F.: Paidós, 2010), 50. Originally published in *debate feminista* in October 1997.

⁷ Carlos Monsiváis, “Ortodoxia y heterodoxia en las alcobas (Hacia una crónica de costumbres y creencias sexuales en México),” in *Que se abra esa puerta: Crónicas y ensayos sobre la diversidad sexual* (Mexico, D.F.: Paidós, 2010), 228. Originally published in *debate feminista* in April 1995.

Monsiváis juxtaposed this absence against the plethora of works that appeared, particularly in the late nineteenth century, in Europe and the United States, works that focused on all manner of sexual behaviors, from masturbation to homosexuality. In contrast, in Mexico, the

predilection for the same sex stayed at such a cultural distance that it was not required to summon itself in contrast to the psychological and corporal virtues of virility that would characterize debates about nation, sexuality, gender, and normativity in the twentieth century. That the nefarious sin contradicted the “essence” of Mexicans was not admitted through writing, and the castigation of the *marica*, the monopolist of grievances against masculinity, was left to oral culture.⁸

It seems that Monsiváis was so eager to claim a nineteenth century, “obvious gay” antecedent against this silence that he revised his previous positions to include the literary character Chucho, a flamboyant dandy and conspicuous consumer of sumptuous goods found in the novel *Historia de Chucho el niffo* (1871) by José Tomás de Cuéllar.⁹

Other scholars have built upon Monsiváis’s argument about the lack of discourse on and visible examples of sodomy in the nineteenth century. For example, although Robert McKee Irwin cogently challenged a number of assumptions made about gender and sexuality in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, he accepted Monsiváis’s claim because sodomy, according to him, had disappeared from the gender discourse of the century.¹⁰ Irwin based his claims on close readings of literary texts from the early 1800s and asserted, “No one accused effeminate men of homosexuality and, similarly, the ideal of virility did not point to an essential heterosexuality, simply because such concepts did not exist.”¹¹

⁸ Monsiváis, “Los que tenemos unas manos que no nos pertenecen,” 50-52.

⁹ Carlos Monsiváis, “The 41 and the Gran Redada,” in *The Famous 41: Sexuality and Social Control in Mexico, 1901*, ed. Robert McKee Irwin, Edward J. McCaughan, and Michelle Rocio Nasser (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 140. I unpack this character in a subsequent section, but for the time being, it is important to note that multiple readings of the character can be made that are actually more relevant to understanding sex/gender and queer legacies in Mexico than Monsiváis’s argument.

¹⁰ Robert McKee Irwin, *Mexican Masculinities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 2. Irwin did note that Monsiváis erred in stating that the Oscar Wilde trials had not been covered in the Mexican press, citing articles in both *El Nacional* and *El Universal* on August 9, 1895. Ibid., 240.

¹¹ Ibid., 2. Naturally, the categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality did not exist, but as I argue below, literary texts are not sufficient for arguing there was no connection between sexuality and gender.

Irwin was correct to challenge a reading of Mexican history through the sociological and anthropological models constructed starting in the 1950s that have asserted “effeminate men *are* homosexual, and homosexuals have to be, by tautology, effeminate men.”¹² According to this model, homosexuals would also play the “feminine” role, i.e., “give up” their manhood through “passive” sexuality with another man. These assertions, as I argued in the introduction, were myths fashioned by Mexicans and foreign observers under influence from the processes of Mexican national formation, well after homosexuality and heterosexuality had been defined within Mexican public and professional discourses. They also have occluded the true complexities of Mexican sex/gender experiences under a cloud of imagined “authenticity.” This in turn was based more on the desires to codify Mexican heterosexuality and its twentieth-century social realities (as rooted in a political reading of the traumatic colonial past) than it was on actual historical legacies.¹³ This has allowed for assertions of continuity with the colonial past as it was *imagined*, rather than as the historical evidence supports. Such an imagined past facilitated an all too neat line from conquest to the twentieth century that says more about how Mexico sought to identify itself than it did about the actual histories lying between what the colonial past was imagined to be and the twentieth century.¹⁴ Moreover, a diversity of gendered and sexual behaviors and identities coexisted and overlapped; thus Irwin’s assertion that gender and sexuality were conceived of differently in the nineteenth and early twentieth century is a crucial intervention.

However, the nineteenth century was *not* one devoid of public discussion of sodomy, nor was it one in which all connections between sodomy and gender norms were erased; both Nesvig

¹² Ibid.

¹³ The influence of Octavio Paz and his “active-passive binary” is one explanation for these myths, as is the lack of historical studies on issues of homosexuality and masculinity. See Chapter 6.

¹⁴ This tendency remains in the encyclopedia “histories” of homosexuality in Mexico, which are heavy on colonial and post-1970 sources.

and Penyak, for example, described sodomy case files during the early part of the century.¹⁵ In addition, while the ideas of heterosexuality and homosexuality as they were understood in much of the twentieth century—as behaviors and identities attributable to types of individuals—were not in circulation, that is not to say that ideas about sexuality were absent entirely from nineteenth-century public discourses, including those that dealt with gender norms, crime, medical jurisprudence, and the nation. Archival documents detailing sodomy cases, newspaper articles, and other texts complicate this period in which sodomy did not remain as the “champion of sins”, as Nesvig averred, but instead transitioned from a religious crime to a civil crime and then was decriminalized by early 1871. After that time, behaviors associated with sodomy (and today with homosexuality) were prosecuted under charges of *ultrajes a la moral pública* (outrages against public morality) or crimes *contra buenas costumbres* (against good customs). These alternative offenses criminalized behaviors that included non-normative gender expressions, i.e., the manner in which an *afeminado* dressed, spoke, or conducted himself in public, as well as same-sex interactions. Medical and criminological understandings of sodomy also were changing; *pederastia* (pederasty) was used at times interchangeably with and then replaced *sodomía* in discourses as early as 1874 in some scientific studies, which mirrored changes occurring in Spain and France and the growing influence of foreign medical jurisprudence. However, in Mexico, pederasty was not limited to age-stratified sexual interactions nor to the practice of an adult playing an “active” role with a minor; instead, it was often used to describe homosexual interactions in general, including between minors or between

¹⁵ For his part, Tortorici argued that the active/passive paradigm in those models was inapplicable to the cases he described because of the “penetrational ambiguity” that existed, where it remained “unclear who is penetrating whom for what motives and reasons”, and men who initiated such relations were not always the “active”—in the sense of penetrating another man—nor were the age and gender-stratifications between men necessarily inflexible. Tortorici, as well as Penyak, argued that punishments were not different for being an “active” or “passive” as the modern models would suggest. See Tortorici, “‘Heran Todos Putos,’” 48-49.; Penyak, “Criminal Sexuality,” 279.

adults, regardless of the role played. While corruption of minors was a crime, not all pederasty was clearly criminal, should it occur between adults. As a consequence, it was not a clearly delineated category of crime in the federal penal code after 1871.¹⁶

In sum, sodomy was not the crime that “dare not speak its name” in Mexico at all. Overtime, it lost much of its previous meaning—i.e., as a nefarious sin—even as discourses of vice and sin remained even after decriminalization; it also transitioned into a civil crime prior to 1871, rather than an ecclesiastical one, only to be later dismissed as a largely private affair out of the government’s purview. The status of sodomy as criminal, then, reflects the evolving relationship between the Mexican state and sexuality’s role in defining citizenship, particularly as influenced by ideas from the Napoleonic Code and French and Spanish jurisprudence. As new notions of the public and private spheres emerged in the nineteenth century and the related gendered segregation of society was enacted, sexuality became regarded as a private act. Yet a seeming compromise was made between those who wanted to criminalize sexual deviance and those who viewed it as outside the state’s purview, so long as it did not emerge to infect the public sphere.¹⁷ Indeed, like in France, which decriminalized sodomy in 1791, homosexual behaviors continued to be prosecuted in Mexico after 1871 not under sodomy law, but as “moral offenses,” particularly as they related to queer expressions in public.

II. Sodomy in Nineteenth Century Mexico

Contrary to what Monsiváis and Irwin argued, my preliminary survey of nineteenth-century Mexican judicial records and newspaper articles uncovered several references to *sodomía* and *afeminados*—the latter first used as an adjective, then as a noun for a type that incorporated

¹⁶ Both pederasty—understood as occurring between members of the same sex, regardless of age—and moral outrages would be prosecuted in the twentieth century. See chapters 3 and 6.

¹⁷ This would seem to be the opposite to the house/street dichotomy, i.e., the protection of the house from contamination of the street, insofar as the refuge of sexual deviance, under the new definitions, would be the private home and it would remain so, so long as there was not a sortie into the street where others might be scandalized.

sexuality—as well as references to *maricones* and *marimaricas*.¹⁸ These references are not limited to the Porfirian period in the late 1800s, and while they did not necessarily always imply same-sex sexual interactions, they nevertheless did not preclude them either, particularly as the words had referenced deviant sexuality among other behaviors since the colonial period.

Some of the earliest references to sodomy in post-independence Mexico can be found in judicial records.¹⁹ In 1827 José Cervantes was remitted to authorities on charges of sodomy; that same year, Antonio González was jailed for committing sodomy with a female donkey.²⁰ Sodomy in these cases referred to aberrant sexual acts in general, not only same-sex sexual acts, even as sodomy often referred to such acts. Sentences varied. In 1825, José María Balderama was sentenced to ten years forced labor aboard the ships at Veracruz for sodomy.²¹ In contrast, in 1843, Agustín Rojas was condemned to a year of public works.²² In 1857, Bartolomé Benítez and Gabino Malerbo were sentenced to forced labor for sodomy in Veracruz state.²³

Newspapers also reported on sodomy, particularly in the 1840s and 1850s; those arrested or charged with sodomy were public knowledge, and the “vice” itself was known in public forums. For example, sodomy was described as a “horrendous crime” in the October 1843 edition of *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*.²⁴ In August 1848, one Francisco Vega was absolved of

¹⁸ I also found references to the *marimacho/as*, i.e., masculine women, many of whom liked other women.

¹⁹ I am currently unable to delve more deeply into this cases until full copies of the case files can be obtained.

²⁰ See AGN, Instituciones Gubernamentales: época moderna y contemporánea, Administración Pública Federal S. XIX, Justicia, Justicia (118), Contenedor 020, Volumen 94, exp. 4 and 7.

²¹ See AGN, Instituciones Gubernamentales: época moderna y contemporánea, Administración Pública Federal S. XIX, Justicia, Justicia (118), Contenedor 009, Volumen 43, exp. 15

²² See AGN, Instituciones Gubernamentales: época moderna y contemporánea, Administración Pública Federal S. XIX, Justicia, Justicia (118), Contenedor 006, Volumen 29, exp. 32

²³ AGN, Instituciones Gubernamentales: época moderna y contemporánea, Administración Pública Federal S. XIX, Justicia, Justicia (118), Contenedor 113, Volumen 553, exp. 51. Such differences seem to have reflected differing opinions over time on the severity of the crime by judicial authorities, differences among jurisdictions, or the actual events of the cases themselves.

²⁴ “Remetidos,” *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*, October 30, 1843, 2. The concentration of references to sodomy occur in the newspaper *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*. It is possible that this was a publication more open to publishing such accounts than others—thus accounting for the lack of similar references in other papers—although this is just a preliminary observation based on what materials are extant in digital search materials currently available. It is quite likely that

“attempted sodomy” by the Mexican Supreme Court.²⁵ In June 1850, court secretaries recorded that in the previous month, three men were in prison for sodomy.²⁶ The daytime watch (*resguardo diurno*) apprehended on March 12, 1851 nine men and one woman for a variety of crimes, including the “charge of sodomy.”²⁷ Newspaper *El Universal* also reported on sodomy that year, noting that between December 1850 and November 1851, seven men had been sent to prison for sodomy.²⁸ In May 1852, three men were incarcerated for sodomy, and another for *crimen nefando* (“abominable crime”), according to a prison inventory.²⁹ Later that year, court clerks noted during their inventory that two men were incarcerated in federal jails for sodomy.³⁰ These examples demonstrate that deviant sexualities were indeed discussed in nineteenth century press reports and judicial proceedings. Thus, while periods of “silence” may have existed, they were never as complete or as pervasive as the previous perspectives have claimed.³¹

If sodomy did not disappear in popular nineteenth century discourses, as Monsiváis claimed, then was sodomy also not associated with effeminacy, as Irwin claimed? Was there a

many more references exist, but finding them will take a sustained investigation. Unfortunately, none of these articles have details on the events that occurred or aspects of the individual’s lives.

²⁵ “Parte Oficial, Gobierno General, Ministerio de Justicia y Negocios Eclesiásticos,” *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*, August 14, 1848, 1.

²⁶ “Parte Oficial, Ministerio de Justicia y Negocios Eclesiásticos: Suprema Corte de Justicia,” *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*, June 10, 1850, 1.

²⁷ “Policia,” *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*, March 14, 1851, 4.

²⁸ “Estadística criminal,” *El Universal*, December 30, 1851, 4. This information apparently also appeared in *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*, as *El Universal* claimed to have read it there. This shows that information was circulating between newspapers, thereby meeting different readerships.

²⁹ “Visita,” *El Universal*, June 18, 1852, 3. It is possible that the latter also referred to sex between men; since colonial times, the *pecado nefando* (“abominable sin”) had often been synonymous with sodomy, and this could have been a secularization of the previous term. At least one source printed in post-independence Mexico described the *crimen nefando* as including both sodomy and bestiality. The punishment described—the hanging and burning of the accused—was a reference to the actions conducted during the Inquisition and colonial period. See *Ordenanza militar para el régimen, disciplina, subordinación, y servicio del ejército*, vol. 2 (Mexico: J. M. Lara, 1842), 201. I have not found examples that similar hangings and burnings occurred during the nineteenth century.

³⁰ “Suprema corte de justicia,” *El Universal*, September 30, 1852, 2.

³¹ Further research might illuminate the periods, such as the 1830s and 1860s, that appear to contain less examples of sodomy in either the press or archival records. Some of the gaps in the record may be due to the number and types of periodicals and records still extant, as not all reported on sodomy and there are gaps in what has been preserved. They may also result from ongoing political and social conditions and disruptions during the period; the 1860s, for example, were a period of intense conflict in Mexico.

pronounced separation of sexuality and gender, to the extent that male effeminacy was not considered related to sodomy? This perspective is complicated by periodical sources dealing with issues of male effeminacy and the emergence of the *afeminado* as a “type.” These sources suggest that while different patterns of gender and sexuality did circulate in post-independence Mexico, neither gender nor sexuality were fully separate. In reality, a man judged as *afeminado* (effeminate) or as an *afeminado* could also have his sexuality questioned.³²

During the 1800s, male effeminacy was associated with decadence and failed forms of government—ancient or contemporary—in ways that referenced, at least indirectly, ideas and behaviors also associated with sodomy. As early as 1810, the *Diario de México* attributed the failure of the ancient Greeks to resist Roman conquest to their “luxury and riches” (*luxo y las riquezas*); these effeminized the Greeks, making them *afeminados*, i.e. “effeminates.”³³ Similarly, on November 27, 1815, the *Diario de México*, in an article concerned with the physical health, nutrition, and morality of youths—and the failures of parents to provide for them—denounced men who impeded the women’s efforts to care for their children through their own inability “to endure an inconvenience.” Such men wanted to be fathers “without participating in the work and the bad times inherent in this august work” and were “more effeminate than the Sybarites,” the inhabitants of the Greek city Sybaris who were known for pleasure-seeking and sensual licentiousness.³⁴ By turning away from good governance and society-building activities in their own search for pleasure, the Greeks had doomed themselves. Likewise, nineteenth-century men who pursued pleasures threatened both the basic nutrition of

³² This does not mean, however that such interrogation of a man’s gender or sexual proclivities occurred along the same lines as those that existed in the second-half of the twentieth century.

³³ “Continúa el discurso sobre el arte de la guerra,” *Diario de México*, November 19, 1810, 567. *Luxo* would change spelling to *lujo* later.

³⁴ “Educación física,” *Diario de México*, November 27, 1815, 1. The article began in the previous issue with “Educación física,” *Diario de México*, November 26, 1815.

Mexican youths and the stable family, the unit upon which national health was constructed. These are, of course, old tropes of republican virtue/duty and its antithesis, vice, that can be found in the classical works of Aristotle, Polybius, and Cicero, and most especially, in Machiavelli's writings during the Renaissance.

Similar references would appear later in the century that also linked effeminacy with cowardice, decadence, and the rise and fall of nations. In 1841, *El Siglo Diez y Nueve* presented a translation of Athenian politician / general Phocion's third conversation on morality and politics. Phocion was known for his belief in frugality and humility; in the translated piece, he described to his colleagues how sensuality—which manifested itself in vice, pleasure, and licentiousness—should be banished for its enervating effects on “voluptuous men” and its creation of “effeminate citizens incapable of resisting the hardships, vigils, and works that many times depend on health.”³⁵ Sensuality and conspicuous consumption wore youths out, weakening the nation's strength and ability to resist enemies, uphold justice, and enact prudent decisions.³⁶ The newspaper expressed similar views itself a few months later in an article entitled “Educación política.” In a republic, argued the article, love of the *patria* was the goal of political education, so as to prevent corruption, bad “effeminate governments” led by lesser men, and insincere and unfaithful revolutions that betrayed those that supported them. Asked the article,

In a long series of effeminate governments (*gobiernos afeminados*), what virtues could citizens acquire or cultivate? In such governments in which one can see only luxury and immoralization, one cannot learn morality nor at least habituate oneself to temperance.³⁷

Without such temperance and moral education, an individual's “exaggerated desires” would damage the nation, ensuring the same fate as befell the Greeks described by *Diario de México*.

³⁵ “Voluptuous men” would become a term directly related to homosexuality by the turn of the century, if it already was not; dandies and *señoritos* would be considered voluptuous for their conspicuous consumption.

³⁶ “Conversaciones de Focion, sobre la relación de la moral con la política,” *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*, December 12, 1841, 2-3. Mexican youths, queer and normative, are the subject of the subsequent chapter.

³⁷ “Educación política,” *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*, April 21, 1843, 4.

The term *afeminado*—both as an adjective and a noun—was thus linked to politics and personal morality; it signified weakness, effeminacy, and corruption, even anti-republican and anti-national vices.³⁸ Moreover, historical examples—from the Greeks and Romans, as well as others offered on European empires—showed that indulgence of *afeminados* undermined civilizations, military campaigns, and more.³⁹ *Afeminados* were also linked with cowards, a type of man antithetical to national organization.⁴⁰

Each of these examples describe the term in relation to gender and the failure of men to be appropriately masculine in the eyes of the commentators. Effeminate men were dangerous and did not exhibit the qualities that were needed, whether in the family, the public sphere, or in the conduct of nations.; they could not be the providers that they were required to be in a system that left few options for women, other than the “cult of domesticity.”⁴¹ Yet did such failures extend beyond gender into sexual deviancy? Did the criticisms levied contain implications or references to the “sin that dare not speak its name?”

Zeb Tortorici has argued that sodomy was part of the capital sin of *luxuria* (“excess”; later spelled *lujuria*). The *Diccionario de la lengua castellana* in 1726 defined *luxuria* as “the disordered appetite, or the excessive use of sensuality or carnality.”⁴² Such sexual excess and disorder (*lujuria*) was not far removed from the decadence and excessive luxury (*lujo*); both, stemming from the same Latin root, referred to inappropriate excess and disorders of appetites.

³⁸ These meanings would persist into the twentieth century.

³⁹ See for example the series of articles appearing in *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*; on *afeminados* in the Italian aristocracy, “Reseña de relaciones internacionales: Italia,” *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*, July 4, 1843, 2.; on Spain humiliating empires of *afeminados*, see “Roger de flor: Expedición de los Catalanes y Aragoneses a Contantinopla,” *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*, September 20, 1843, 3.

⁴⁰ “Remitidos: Dictámen que la comision de negocios eclesiásticos presentó al congreso constituyente del estado de Guatemala en 29 de Abril de 1845, en el cual, por los justos motivos que se espresan, se propone la derogatoria del decreto de 3 de Julio de 1843, espedido por la asamblea constituyente del mismo, permitiendo la venida de los padres de la Compañía de Jesus,” *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*, September 7, 1845, 2.

⁴¹ See for example the arguments made in Silvia Marina Arrom, *The Women of Mexico City, 1790-1857* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1985).

⁴² Tortorici, ““Heran Todos Putos,”” 21, 65.

While the former had a sexual connotation, the latter was used to denote those who failed to live up to their masculine duties. Given the historical connections between luxurious excess, sensuality, and sexual excess—part of the turn away from “good governance” towards personal pleasures that characterized the decadent civilizations of old—the blurring of effeminacy and material excess into sexual excess cannot be discounted.

The *Enciclopedia moderna*, published in Madrid between 1851 and 1855 and a “universal dictionary of literature, the sciences, arts, agriculture, industry, and commerce,” linked *lujuria* to deviant cultures, Biblical and classical:

LUJURIA. (*Higiene*).⁴³: the disordered appetite can be defined by saying it is the abuse of the natural exercise of the genital organs and the perversion of their normal use in a preternatural other. The abuses should be described as not only those damaging to health, but also whatever relation between both sexes different from marriage, and even in the case of those married, whatever excess that does not have the propagation of the species as its object.

Perversion, whose principle forms are onanism, pederasty or sodomy, and bestiality, cannot have any object that is enough to justify it, because the act through its nature is essentially depraved.⁴⁴

The entry continued by describing forms of lustfulness, lechery, libertine lifestyles, and seduction; later paragraphs made mention of prostitution, as well as Sodom and Gomorrah, Babylon, Rome, and the libertine life in Paris.⁴⁵ Still others detailed its connection to Greece:

Sodomy extended throughout Greece; the schools of the philosophers converted into houses of corruption; and the grand examples of friendship that paganism has bequeathed only consist primarily of an infamous wrongness covered with the veil of a holy appearance.⁴⁶

With such a definition, it is thus hard to imagine, particularly by the 1850s, that there was not at

⁴³ This would translate as “luxury” or “luxurious excess”, as well as “lust” and “lechery”.

⁴⁴ *Enciclopedia moderna: diccionario de literatura, ciencias, artes, agricultura, industria y comercio*, vol. 26 (Madrid: Francisco de P. Mellado, 1853), 435.

⁴⁵ Paris as a site of libertine and queer cultures would be a continuing trope into the twentieth century. The encyclopedia also contained a number of perspectives that would continue to resonate in the following decades, including the social and biological origins of libertine behavior, the types of such behavior, and the characteristics of the individuals who practiced it.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

least a whiff of implied sodomy in the denunciations levied against *afeminados*, particularly with reprinting and translation of the denunciations made by Phocion against the failures of his counterparts due to their excesses, sexual or decadent, and the association of effeminacy, decadence, and corruption with failed forms of men and nations.

The encyclopedia entry described above seems to be taken in large part from *La medicina de las pasiones ó las pasiones consideradas con respecto a las enfermedades, las leyes, y la relijion* [sic], a book by Jean Baptiste Félix Descuret which was translated into Spanish in 1842 from the original French version, published in 1841.⁴⁷ It demonstrates that “Greek love”—i.e., sodomy—was well known, and it was tied directly to excess and the legacies of other decadent, perverse civilizations. By referencing the licentious cultures of Greece, Rome, and Europe in their condemnations of *afeminados*, Mexican editorialists thus created a space in which judgments on sexual perversity, as well as gender deviancy, could occur. Importantly, this encyclopedia article also was an early example noting that pederasty and sodomy were the same vice or crime, and that they were social hygiene problems for the morality of youths, adults, and society itself. Such themes would continue throughout the century.

These examples are important, if preliminary, remedies to assertions that sodomy was not a concern during the nineteenth century. Moreover, these examples demonstrate the origin of at least one discursive thread that was marked by gendered, socio-economic, and racial characteristics: sodomy, like luxurious excess, was something that occurred among the decadent elite and its influence could be found as much in their corrupt political practices as in their moral excesses. This thread would form the basis of the attack levied against the Porfirian regime at the close of the nineteenth century.

⁴⁷ Jean Baptiste Félix Descuret, *La medicina de las pasiones ó las pasiones consideradas con respecto a las enfermedades, las leyes y la relijion*, trans. D. Pedro Felipe Monlau (Barcelona: Imprenta de Don Antonio Bergnes, 1842). Chapter six deals with *lujuria*, starting on page 259.

III. Shifting Penal Codes, 1859-1931: New Definitions of Citizenship and Law

Until the 1871 penal code, same-sex sexual interactions were illegal. Over time, laws became less stringent towards sexual acts between men (or between women); criminal justice practices also were at times more lenient than might expected from the laws. Sodomy, in other words, lost some of the graveness that had lead to its zealous, if uneven, persecution in the previous centuries.

Sodomy was described as a crime in the *Leyes de reforma* (Reform Laws)—a series of laws that aimed for a dramatic transformation of Mexican society—particularly the Matrimonio Civil (Civil Matrimony) law from July 23, 1859.⁴⁸ Sodomy was defined as the *pecado contra natura* (sin against nature); such a “copulation is contrary to the aim of marriage, which as has been said is the generation of offspring.” Sodomy was also defined as distinct from bestiality and onanism, while the same as pederasty, and sodomy between women was defined as “imperfect sodomy”.⁴⁹ In these definitions, the primacy of opposite-sex pairs and reproduction were upheld as the natural ideal, as was male sexual privilege, in so far as penetrative sex was considered “perfect” in comparison to that which occurred without a penis.

From the 1857 constitution, death penalties were no longer “tolerated”; thus the colonial capital punishments for sodomy—conducted with hangings and burnings at the stake—were not sanctioned. Prohibited as well were punishments including “public shaming,” “disgrace,” and “mutilation;” the absence of these punishments showed the “reform,” in the eyes of the Reform

⁴⁸ The Reform laws were a series of laws aimed at reordering Mexican society during the middle of the nineteenth century; they coincided with the bitter and destructive wars from 1854 to 1867 that were fought in large part over divergent ideologies of landholding rights, the rights of the Catholic Church and native peoples, land reforms, and a conversion to wage labor and capitalist economics. Benito Juárez and his liberal compatriots were the authors of many of the laws. The French under Napoleon III and his proxy Maximilian intervened starting in 1861, with Maximilian crowned emperor in 1864 and deposed in 1867, with Juárez resuming his presidency.

⁴⁹ This is probably due to the emphasis placed on penile penetration as the form of “complete” sex.

Laws' authors, of the Mexican penal code into something more just. Men were instead sent to prison for the crime.⁵⁰ In the laws, sodomy, for both men and women, was also classified with other forms of *incontinencia*, i.e., a failure to abstain (which referenced the excesses described in part II above), including adultery, bestiality, *delito nefando*, erotomania, *estupro*, forcible sex, uterine furor, incest, masturbation, nymphomania, onanism, *priapismo*, among others.⁵¹

This collection of terms points to wide-array of sexual activities considered deviant, as well as their increasing medicalization, and the overlaps that remained with vestiges of previous religious language. Sexual excess, such as uterine fury and nymphomania, was beginning to be seen as a medical condition of the body. Although all of these terms would continue to circulate throughout the nineteenth century, gradually those that were more medical or criminological replaced those that were not, while the moral content of the earlier terms—that sodomy was “against nature”—would remain as subtext for later views on same-sex behavior and be blended with science describing the degrading effects—moral, physical, social—of same-sex sexuality.⁵²

By the 1871 *Código Penal*, the influences of the Napoleonic Code and revisions in penal codes in France, Spain, and elsewhere can be seen. These codes had decriminalized sodomy/pederasty due to it being seen as falling outside the purview of the public interest. Sex between men or between women was not of interest to the state because it was a private interaction; the state's only interest was in the public manifestations of such sexuality, such as that found literally in public, that affecting future citizens (youths), or that brought to the

⁵⁰ Blas José Gutiérrez Flores Alatorre, *Nuevo código de la reforma: Leyes de reforma, colección de las disposiciones que se conocen con este nombre, publicadas desde el año de 1855 al de 1870*, vol. 2 (Mexico: Imprenta de "El Constitucional"; Miguel Zoranza, 1870), 19-21. Sodomy was also debated by jurists as grounds warranting a divorce, as it was said to have undermined the faith in marriage, although not everyone agreed on the amount of damage it caused and circumstances mattered. See pages 95-98, volume 2, part 3.

⁵¹ *Delito nefando* could also refer to bestiality, even as the other is mentioned; its meaning here is unclear. See pg 161 of Blas José Gutiérrez Flores Alatorre, *Nuevo código de la reforma: Leyes de reforma, colección de las disposiciones que se conocen con este nombre, publicadas desde el año de 1855 al de 1870*, vol. 1 (Mexico: Imprenta de "El Constitucional"; Miguel Zoranza, 1868).

⁵² *Ibid.*, 705.

attention of authorities through other crimes. In the 1871 Mexican code, Antonio Martínez de Castro, president of the commission charged with forming the code, noted that although some acts constituted a “very grave offense to morality”, those that “did not disrupt the public peace” would not be found therein. Pederasty, like other carnal acts, thus was not of concern, except when such acts “offend decency, when they cause scandal, or are executed through violence.”⁵³

Thus, the category of crimes labeled as *ultrajes á la moral pública, ó á las buenas costumbres*, (articles 785-788 of the code) came to replace previous forms of sexual crimes, because such “outrages against public morals or good customs” scandalized decency. Articles 785 and 786 dealt with creating and distributing “obscene” materials, including “songs, pamphlets, or other obscene papers, or figures, paintings, or engraved or lithographed works that represent lubricious acts.” The penalty was eight days to six months in prison and a fine of 20 to 250 pesos. Article 787, however, enabled the persecution of newly legal homosexual acts under the guise of appeals to “public opinion” and to the amorphous idea of “public decency”:

The penalty of *arresto mayor*⁵⁴ and fine of 25 to 500 pesos will be imposed against those executing a shameless act in a public place, with or without witnesses, or in a private place that can be seen by the public. Every act that in the public opinion is classified as contrary to decency will be considered shameless.⁵⁵

Children were protected as well; should an outrage be committed in the presence of a child fourteen years or younger, the crime would be aggravated, increasing the sentence.⁵⁶

⁵³ Antonio Martínez de Castro, *Código penal para el Distrito Federal y Territorio de la Baja-California sobre delitos del fuero común y para toda la República Mexicana sobre delitos contra la Federación [1871]. Edición correcta, sacada de la oficial, precedida de la exposición de motivos dirigida al supremo gobierno por el C. Lic.... Presidente de la comisión encargada de formar el código* (Veracruz y Puebla: Librerías "La Ilustración", 1891), 44-45.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 118. *Arresto mayor* was for a longer duration in jail, from one to eleven months, in a location separate from individuals sent to prison. If the accused faced two sentences or more that added up to more than 11 months, they were sent to prison instead.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 278.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 278-279.

In this way, anything that was deemed by public opinion as an indecent act was an outrage against public morality. Sexuality, which should be private, remained dangerous for the public sphere because it undermined the social fabric of society on the scale of ancient civilizations. The difference was that sexual excesses had to be *defined* as an outrage against public, meaning likewise a “public” had to be defined; the act of sodomy itself was no longer illegal itself nor always sufficient evidence of criminality. For example, in Oaxaca in 1889, two men—*pulque* maker José Luz Valencia and laborer Rafael Castellanos—were caught having sex in the northern door of the Oaxaca cathedral. However, even though the judge in the case ordered a medical exam—which turned up “signs” of recent sodomy—he dropped the case, asserting that sodomy was not a crime. Neither Rafael—the active partner who admitted the sexual interaction—nor the passive partner José—who denied it—were punished. The medical exam was part of the burgeoning medicalization of homosexual behavior, and, as Kathryn Sloan has argued, a humiliating act that “feminized” José and treated him like poor women who suffered similar exams in cases involving sexuality.⁵⁷

In contrast, the legal “innovation” that crimes of “moral outrages” allowed was the incursion of state power into private sexual lives through the criminalization of gender performances and sexuality contrary to one’s biological sex; it thus allowed a way to recriminalize homosexual behaviors that the Oaxaca judge rightly noted were no longer criminal. What this meant was that police could harass individuals who did not fit into sex/gender norms that were being molded into the virile male/chaste woman paradigm and target stereotypical individuals who “looked” queerly scandalous, as well as those actually committing lewd acts in

⁵⁷ For comments on this case, see Mark Overmyer-Velázquez, *Visions of the Emerald City: Modernity, Tradition, and the Formation of Porfirian Oaxaca, Mexico* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 106. See also Kathryn A Sloan, *Runaway Daughters: Seduction, Elopement, and Honor in Nineteenth-Century Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 199. Neither author cites any reaction from the Church. I talk more about this medicalization in chapter 3.

public. Since public opinion was interpreted to be whatever a policeman, judge, criminologist, or journalist, among others, thought it to be, that left great room for penalizing behaviors on the basis of personal opinion and made individuals who flouted norms easier targets. The emphasis was also on discovery—if an act was discovered, it therefore *was* public; only those that were hidden were outside the purview, however selective or unequally enforced, of the new code and the judicial system that applied it. And while the printed materials that fell under the purview of articles 785 and 786 were frequently used against the production of heterosexual pornography, the article 787 category of “moral outrages” was the means through which sodomy could continue to be persecuted.⁵⁸

Furthermore, by also imposing harsher penalties on acts that occurred in front of a youth, an outrage against public morality was more closely associated with “corruption of minors.” This crime, covered in articles 803-807, was not as specifically defined as it would be in later codes; in the 1871 code it was associated primarily with habitual sexual interactions with youths—although only when they were “consummated”—rather than with vice in general as in later codes.⁵⁹ Penalties were more severe than for moral outrages; for minors up to eighteen years of age, the penalty was six months of jail to eighteen in prison. Should a youth be less than eleven years old, the penalty was double. If the perpetrator was an adult relative of the youth, the penalty was two years in prison, while if the youth was under eleven, the penalty was four years; in both cases, the delinquent was deprived of legal authority over their children. If the perpetrator was an authority figure—such as a teacher or tutor—the base penalties were augmented by a

⁵⁸ This is the same argument made for Spain during the nineteenth century. See Richard Cleminson and Francisco Vázquez García, *'Los Invisibles': A History of Male Homosexuality in Spain, 1850-1939* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), 35-36.

⁵⁹ Martínez de Castro, *Código pena para el Distrito Federal [1871, 1891]*, 282-283. For the contrast in definition, see for example the Código Penal of 1929.

quarter and future opportunities to interact with youths were denied.⁶⁰

Enshrined in the 1871 code, the shift in which sodomy had converted from a nefarious sin to a nefarious crime to a crime against public norms and opinions had been completed. The effect was two-fold. First, the origins of creating homosexuals as defined group can be seen in this shift; no longer was sodomy a crime that could presumably happen to anyone, based on the acts committed. Instead, sets of behaviors and modes of being were criminalized on the basis that they offended sensibilities and the moral or social order. If the public sphere were to be the domain of the virile, honorable man, *afeminados* had no role in that sphere, other than as the foil against which honor was defined. In addition, individuals became seen as types defined by their sexual acts, as well as their outward mannerisms and behaviors. The transition from being seen as effeminate and/or a practitioner of sodomy to being seen as an effeminate-type and congenital or degraded homosexual was thus underway.

Penal codes in the twentieth century built on the 1871 code. The unpopular code of 1929 continued the criminalization of moral outrages against the public. Included in the code's definition of the crime (articles 536-540) again were the creation and distribution of obscene printed and visual materials, "lubricious or obscene scenes" put on in public, and "obscene language" in public. These acts were punishable by up to three months in jail, with a fine of five to fifteen days of financial benefits, and the confiscation of the materials in question. Those that exploited prostitution were also sanctioned, paying up to thirty days of benefits. For those committing a "shameless act" in public, the sentence was up to four months in jail and five to

⁶⁰ Neither crime specified worse punishments for homosexuals. However, in succeeding decades, homosexuality was often used as proof of a crime or an aggravating characteristic, particularly in relation to the corruption of youth, whether through a "moral outrage" or through sexuality itself. Queer men thus were vulnerable to accusations of such outrages and corruption, even as technically their sexual interests were legal; what was an outrage was in the eye of the beholder.

twenty days' worth of benefits.⁶¹

As for corruption of minors (articles 541-546), it was now catalogued along with *ultrajes a la moral* as a crime against public morality, thereby reinforcing the idea of the social degradation of a youth. A new article had been added that prohibited the employment of minors under eighteen in cantinas, taverns, brothels, and cabarets. Contravening this regulation cost the perpetrator a year in prison, along with fifteen to thirty days of benefits and the definitive closing of the establishment in question. A minor who took a job in the such establishments would face the same punishment, while their parents would face penalties based on the abandonment of the child, including up to four years in prison, depending on the age of the minor. Once more, parents and those with authority over youths lost their rights with the sentencing of this crime.⁶²

This code, however, was only in effect a short time due to the complaints levied by legal professionals, its complexity, and its inflexibility. Many judges and criminologists wanted more judicial discretion so that justice could be more equitably dispensed to people of very different social, economic, racial, and cultural backgrounds, at least in theory. Thus, the Código Penal of 1931 installed increased judicial discretion as its primary reform. Articles 51 and 52 advised judges to consider the circumstances—both external and peculiar to the delinquent—surrounding the crime, as well as the special conditions of the moment of the crime and the antecedents and conditions of the delinquent that demonstrated his propensity for further crime.⁶³ The new code was eclectic, blending the more traditional perspectives from the 1871 code and earlier codes with ideas from modern criminal science. It focused on simplicity, rather than the previous code's dogmas, and the effective reparation of damages. And it enshrined two positivist ideas—

⁶¹ Manuel Andrade, *Nuevo Código Penal para el Distrito y territorios federales y leyes complementarias* (Mexico: Herrero Hermanos Sucesores, 1930), 187-188.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 188-190.

⁶³ Robert M. Buffington, *Criminal and Citizen in Modern Mexico* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 125.

the individualization of punishment and the decreased reliance on abstract ethical standards.⁶⁴

Article 200 dealt with *ultrajes a la moral pública*. Those accused faced six months to five years of prison and up to ten thousand pesos in a fine. Once again, everything from publications to displays of obscenity were considered an outrage. Articles 201-205 dealt with *corrupción de menores*, the perpetrators of which also faced six months to five years. What was different about the 1931 code—which, although revised, is still in effect—was the distinctions it made on the aggravating circumstances around the corruption of a minor and the expansion of the crime’s definition. Corrupting a minor included facilitating their sexual depravation or initiating them into sex, as well as initiating them into mendicancy, depraved habits, drunkenness, the use of drugs, or into a criminal association. Moreover, when the acts committed “resulted in the acquisition of alcoholism, drug abuse or use of toxic substances, prostitution, or homosexual practices, or membership in a criminal organization,” the penalty was increased to five to ten years and a fine of twenty-five thousand pesos. As before, youths were prohibited from working in cantinas, *centros de vicio*, or taverns; those that employed them, as well as parents or authority figures who corrupted youths, had their sentences augmented with further punishment.⁶⁵

The code thus intimately linked homosexuality with the corruption of minors and aggravated sentences that dealt with homosexual acts. While homosexuality was technically legal, the 1931 code increased the threat that individuals faced should they be caught in homosexual acts, because such acts were deemed as transmissible to others, thereby serving to corrupt them. Moreover, both the claim of public outrages and corruption of minors could be deployed in situations where it was unclear that youths were even involved or present; indeed, acts between adults would be considered as both on the basis that they *could* have influenced a

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ *Código penal para el Distrito y Territorios Federales: Ley orgánica y normas de procedimiento de los tribunales para menores.*, 10th ed. (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Porrúa, S.A., 1966).

hypothetical youth, had one been present. Even who was considered a minor was not solid in the period. Wider jurisdiction in the hands of judges allowed for abuses of the system, particularly when those who were charged were less able, due to social status or stigma, to defend themselves effectively.

One final note: although the federal penal code was the most influential in Mexico, states continued to have authority over their own laws as well. For example, even though the 1871 federal penal code made no mention of sodomy, the 1906 penal code for Yucatán state castigated sodomy with six years of prison when it occurred without consent and three years with consent.⁶⁶ This was a stark contrast to viewing consensual sodomy as a private affair, rather than a public concern. Decriminalization was thus not universal, and even when states began to do so, they left provisions in their codes like those from the 1931 Federal code, that aggravated sentences based on circumstances, including the “initiation”, real or presumed, into homosexuality.

IV. Chucho El Ninfo: Beautiful Men, Ugly Men, and National Survival

At the same time as effeminacy was being redefined in terms of sexuality as well as gender in the Mexican public sphere, legal codes, and language, the literary character of *Chucho el Ninfo* appeared. Novelist José Tomás Cuéllar described his protagonist in *Historia de Chucho el ninfo* (1871, reprinted 1890) as a *ninfo* of a *mundo ninfea*, literally a “water-lily world.”⁶⁷ Chucho was a *gentleman* (italics in the original) with an elegant and scented body, who never wanted to appear ugly in his presentation; he was interested in narcissistic pleasures and aesthetic experiences, rather than more “substantial” masculine pursuits. Cuéllar thus linked the character

⁶⁶ *Código penal*, vol. 1 (Mérida: Diario Oficial del gobierno del estado libre y soberano de Yucatán, 1906), 104.

⁶⁷ José Tomás de Cuéllar, *Historia de Chucho el Ninfo*, vol. 2 (Barcelona: Tipo-Litografía de Hermenegildo Miralles, 1890); José Tomás de Cuéllar, *Historia de Chucho el Ninfo*, vol. 1 (Barcelona: Tipo-Litografía de Hermenegildo Miralles, 1890). As a “nymph” or a “narcissist”; possibly a “fairy” as translated by Aaron Walker from Monsiváis’s article in the *Famous 41*. See Monsiváis, “The 41 and the Gran Redada.” I discuss this more fully below.

of Chucho to the emerging image of the aristocratic dandy who consumed fine goods as a sign of elegance and personal refinement. His use of the English term also showed how the dandy type was foreign, something new that had appeared on the Mexican scene, and thus, something disruptive of autochthonous traditions. Chucho confounded male observers in the novel, and they criticized him as an *afeminado* based on his fashion preferences. Such criticism was meant to denigrate his reputation, yet it was precisely his fashionableness that allowed him to be a ladies man among the “foolish” girls at parties:

The young woman considers a man as a pretty toy: that is why girls are enamored with the most meticulous and unsubstantial lad, with he that has the prettiest eyes and is most effeminate. In this terrain, Chucho el Ninfo has no rival.⁶⁸

For these women, Chucho’s beauty and immaculate presentation was appealing, which rankled his competition, who saw him as nothing more than a puppet disgracefully distracting inexperienced women from “real men” who were not “pretty” and who possessed substance, rather than superficial elegance.⁶⁹ The women chose the beautiful lad (*pollo*) over real men (*hombres*) because of the cultural tastes, effeminacy, and frivolity he shared with them. Those that resisted him claimed he was “too meticulous” for their taste and saw his vanity and effeminacy as drawbacks. But for most, Chucho was irresistible; he “painted his lips and wore tight boots, making them curl at the front, smelling of magnolia and talking slow”, traits that made him “priceless” to young women.⁷⁰

These same traits would earn him criticism because they were symbolic of his disregard for propriety and masculine virtue. He was an “adept of scandal and immorality”, rather than an honorable man, concerned with only the “cult” of his own person, talking about himself

⁶⁸ Cuéllar, *Historia de Chucho el Ninfo*, vol. 2, 151.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 112-113.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 152.

incessantly in conversation; his only, “cynical” desire was to appear beautiful.⁷¹ He was thus the epitome of the decadent man that worried real-world commentators of the day, a Sybarite who spent most of his time on his own self-presentation, the fashioning of which Cuéllar described in detail in order to affirm Chucho’s otherness. For example,

His use of cold-cream had realized his fantasy of having a virginal complexion; he had managed to maintain his eyelashes arched, heating them with a device of his own invention; he painted his lips with carmine, and he had ten diverse preparations to conserve his teeth.⁷²

A few pages later, Cuéllar described more of Chucho’s primping, hygienic routine: first, he used “various waters and distinct soaps” which he dried off with an exquisite towel; second, he applied his cold-cream and then “rice powder”; he then “cleaned his teeth, pursed and painted his lips.” In addition, he was dedicated to

curling his hair, assuring that two curls shaded his forehead, leaving them to fall symmetrically and as if by chance; he used white cosmetics to accent certain parts of his hair and he put brilliantine in his beard.⁷³

To conclude, he applied “drops of aromatic vinegar” to perfume himself.

In these two passages, Cuéllar demonstrated Chucho’s difference from other men so effectively that later writers, such as Carlos Monsiváis, read Chucho as an “obvious gay”, who Cuéllar had mocked and ridiculed, rather than the irresistible ladies’ man Chucho himself claimed and seemed to be.⁷⁴ Monsiváis built his argument on the assertion that Cuéllar was, through his portrayal of Chucho, describing an actual *afeminado* and covertly alluding to the *vicio nefando* (i.e., sodomy) without overtly stating it; this obfuscation was for the sake of

⁷¹ Ibid., 139-140.

⁷² Ibid., 105.

⁷³ Ibid., 109.

⁷⁴ Carlos Monsiváis, “Los iguales, los semejantes, los (hasta hace un minuto) perfectos desconocidos (A cien años de la redada de los 41),” in *Que se abra esa puerta: Crónicas y ensayos sobre la diversidad sexual* (Mexico, D.F.: Paidós, 2010), 78. The original article was published in *Debate Feminista* in October 2001.

readers who would reject a story—even a critical one—about a homosexual.⁷⁵ Moreover, Monsiváis noted that Chucho was portrayed as having been at ease around girls from an early age, which in the discourses of the time was a stereotypical piece of evidence supporting that someone was queer. Chucho’s “para-Freudian” mother helped facilitate her son’s effeminacy by indulging his whims—to the point of paying off another mother so that her son would leave Chucho alone—and by delightedly dressing him as a girl after having exhausted her imagination trying to outfit him in “fantastic suits” and having noticed that his “forms had rounded”. Rather than encouraging “manly vigor” in him, she effeminized him:

He was charming, according to Elena, and as Chucho was the object of repeated, lavish attention in feminine clothing, he was fond of this transformation that flattered his vanity as a pretty and spoiled boy.⁷⁶

For Monsiváis, Chucho was thus fashioned into the prototypical homosexual dandy.

Chucho’s passion for fashion would be shared by many later *afeminados* and homosexual dandies, as would be his claims to being the star of attention, his embracing of difference as an effective means of self-presentation and attraction, and his public and personal vanity. One could argue that Chucho epitomized *camp*, taking so seriously aesthetics and his self-presentation as to go to the extreme in its preparation; he reveled in the fun and frivolity of the cult of his own self-presentation—and the superficial, meaningless conquests he acquired among women because of the cult—rather than more “substantial” pursuits, precisely those that were his duty as a male within the public sphere. When he was not primping, he spent his time boasting about himself. These were not the traditional traits of a “real man”, who cared much less for their appearance as

⁷⁵ For more on the “vicio nefando”, see Chapters 1 and 2.

⁷⁶ Cuéllar, *Historia de Chucho el Ninfo*, vol. 1, 22.

such cares were the domain of women, nor was Chucho's vain desire to appear boyish a masculine affectation; a single blemish on his skin would have been a "true disgrace".⁷⁷

In addition, Cuéllar portrayed Chucho as having a special mode of speaking:

Chucho always has his lips half-open, showing a part of his upper teeth, those that generally helped his upper lip pronounce his b's. In addition Chucho whistled his s's, and pronounced his z's slightly...his pronunciation was sweet, soft, and a little apart from the manner in which Spanish is pronounced in Mexico. Chucho's mode of speaking was new and the result of special study: he also spoke very slowly.⁷⁸

Importantly, Cuéllar stated that this mode of speech, like Chucho's dandyism, was new; it was characteristic of the new type that Chucho was, and later queer men would also be known for their speech. Some would even cultivate their speech patterns for specific aims, much as Chucho had been described as doing. In this way, his manner of speaking was an early example of the way that modernity would be experienced and be visualized in Mexico. In fact, Chucho would be the precursor to the elites who, under the Porfirian regime, would cultivate their own cults of self-presentation as part of embracing modernity and Mexico's participation in world political and cultural spheres; that these self presentations were also potentially queer, because of their embracing of new styles and behaviors such as male cross-dressing as part of fancy parties, was grounds under which they were assailed as anti-Mexican.

Chucho reflected a growing awareness of different types of people who were recognizable through their behaviors, mannerisms, modes of speaking, and more—or, who were thought to possess certain qualities. For example, *La Voz de México* ran an article about "the tongue" and its use by different groups in May 1899 that was distinctly gendered:

Valiant men speak poorly of no one, but *afeminados* and cowards distinguish themselves through their disagreeable tongue. They cannot fight face-to-face, they cannot measure

⁷⁷ Cuéllar, *Historia de Chucho el Ninfo*, vol. 2, 106. Interestingly, boasting would later become enshrined as part of being *macho*.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

themselves against their superiors, turning to the tongue to wound someone at close range, a pardonable tactic among women but unworthy of men.⁷⁹

La Voz de México thus marked homosexuals both as biologically male and as compromised men who were recognizable through their cowardly, “womanly” use of the tongue as a weapon. Indeed, “underhanded jealousy” was the cause of such attacks, as such men sought to undermine the credibility of their colleagues or enemies without an open confrontation. In contrast, the “serious and capable, self-assured man” did not look to discredit others in such a manner. To drive the point home, the newspaper invoked national imagery of the eagle and the serpent: “Jealousy does not exist in the eagle, who looks from above; but it does in the reptile who slithers always hungry for something he cannot reach by himself.”

In this description, a distinction between discrete, honest, and honorable men and their irresponsible, cowardly opposites is made through imagery that invoked Mexico’s national myth. On the Mexican coat of arms and flag, the eagle is portrayed clutching the serpent in its talons; this imagery is based on Mexica legend that stated when an eagle was found perched on a nopal cactus clutching a serpent, the new capital of the future Mexica Empire—the famous city of Tenochtitlán—would be founded upon that spot.⁸⁰ But in the specific usage that *La Voz en México* employed, the virtuous “real man” was portrayed as the eagle, having mounted the greatest heights by his own skills, while the serpent at his feet was of lesser quality, unable to do so.⁸¹ Indeed, in the newspaper’s own words, “He [the reptile] cannot climb to the heights, and he looks cowardly for the way to bring them down to earth so he can eventually raise his crocodile

⁷⁹ “La Lengua,” *La Voz de Mexico*, May 19, 1899, 2.

⁸⁰ This is the more accurate name for the people who for much of the twentieth century were described as the “Aztecs”.

⁸¹ This bifurcation of qualities associated with various types of individuals is discussed also in relation to batteries of psychological examinations given to youths in the Tribunal de Menores. See chapter 3.

tail over the rubble.”⁸² This evocation of reptile imagery was even more potent because not only was such a man dishonorable—and anti-Mexican—but he was also potentially queer, as one of the terms that was already in circulation for a queer man was *lagartijo*, i.e., lizard. In this way, national imagery and the delineation of citizens—that is, who was an honorable man/citizen and who was not—became inextricably linked with normative, masculine rejections of queerness.

Men who used their (serpentine) tongues as weapons were *afeminados* and *afeminados* were recognizable for their use of the tongue in this manner. Such “men” were only men provisionally, as they were jealous, slithering creatures aiming to break down the works of others and even the nation itself, and therefore, traitors to their sex and *la patria* itself. In essence, the *afeminado* was among those “men” who were not true citizens, who expressed no honor or civic virtue, and who were foils against which the nation could be defined. A man in the real world who resembled Chucho in appearance and who was recognizable for manners of speaking would thus be marked as anti-Mexican and a threat to the sex/gender and social norm, not the least because he would be underhanded with other men, but also in his ability to distract others from more serious problems in the public sphere and his ability to blur the bifurcation of society into private/public, feminine/masculine spaces.⁸³ That such men existed and reflected the stereotype suggests that Cuéllar was an observant critic of emergent forms of identity and queerness in modern Mexico. The question, though, is whether or not queer life in turn of the century-Mexico

⁸² Other than mentioning the “slithering” reptile, no overt reference is made to a snake; this omission and the use of a crocodile tail may have been meant to protect the honor of the national symbol itself, while simultaneously making use of it in a way readily recognizable to readers.

⁸³ Salvador Novo and his colleagues among the artists and writers in the Contemporáneos during the 1920s would be such men, recognizable in their style and manner, and noted for their at times biting criticism of other, more stereotypically “revolutionary” writers and artists. See Chapters 3 and 4. An aside: the interest shown someone like Chucho by women—as well as the interest that Chucho or someone like him showed back—would be in the views of the day a sign not of hypermasculine sexual desire, but as corrupted, queer sexuality. “Don Juanism”—i.e., the conquest of multiple women for superficial reasons and self-gratification, was instead a sign of homosexuality. I discuss this more fully in Chapter 2 and subsequent sections. Women “distracted” by the specter of the queer man might not be able to serve their role as mothers for “real men” who were needed to advance the nation’s future.

and beyond only corresponded to the stereotype's vision; that is, what in the stereotype was accurate and what were its limitations?

Certainly Mexicans faced reactions to their sexual deviance during the turn-of-the century and beyond that were similar to those Chucho experienced; they faced ridicule, challenges to their masculinity and status as citizens, and significant abuse on the basis of being different. In addition, many *afeminados*—ranging from those who were known to dress in women's clothing to the decadent dandy—were notable for their conspicuous consumption, their use of beauty products, and their indulgence of aesthetics and self-enjoyment, rather than the political convictions of the times.⁸⁴ Monsiváis's reading is thus a striking one. Chucho foreshadows how sexual and gendered deviance would be understood later in the twentieth century. From the fin-de-siècle, criminologists, advice columnists, doctors, and cultural critics would localize the threats facing the Mexican nation as rooted in a feminization of Mexican men and would question the influence that mothers and female educators had on boys, worried that their influence would result in effeminate sissy boys, rather than virile future citizens. Chucho el Ninfo thus provides a valuable frame that, while describing a literary character, nevertheless offers a vantage point from which to begin, a window into the murky moment in the last decades of the nineteenth century when some men took advantage of the new forms of public life, capitalist consumption, and urban social spheres in order to fashion a queer, "salted world", a world that troubled and fascinated critics simultaneously.

"Donjuanismo", "Ninfo"-mania, and Homosexuality

⁸⁴ See for example the examples raised by Victor Macías-González, "The Lagartijo at the High Life: Masculine Consumption, Race, Nation, and Homosexuality in Porfirian Mexico," in *The Famous 41: Sexuality and Social Control in Mexico, 1901*, ed. Robert McKee Irwin, Edward J. McCaughan, and Michelle Rocio Nasser (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 227-250.

Although Chucho can and should be read as a literary precursor to queer men in the twentieth century—such as transvestites, men like those arrested on the night of November 17, 1901, and the queer dandy—he was also distinct. Chucho, described Cuéllar, dedicated his sexual pursuits to women, while these other men directed theirs, at least in part if not exclusively, to men. Indeed, Cuéllar spent significant time demonstrating the exclusive interest that Chucho had for women.⁸⁵ Indeed, Chucho sought more than attention for his self-presentation; he also sought to augment his “conquests”.⁸⁶ He classified women as “currency”, spending through them because they couldn’t resist him and making “daily conquests” of them.⁸⁷ Perhaps this was intended as a joke, part of the masks Monsiváis claimed were in use to hide his homosexuality. Yet, Cuéllar also described in detail how the girls who liked Chucho were foolish, how Chucho was a representative “adept of scandal and immorality” that cared not for the women he used. Indeed, he had accepted

love as his profession, as his destiny, and was persuaded that the beautiful half of humanity was a collection of junk (*chácharas*) as a gift for the man that knew how to dedicate himself to those innocent entertainments.⁸⁸

Chucho knew how to “remove honor from women, like children took toys from each other,” and he liked his conquests in public. “Secret loves” had no attraction for him, nor those “loving relationships that did not attract the envy and gossip of strangers.”⁸⁹ Such sexual publicity marked him as outrageous, immoral, and dishonorable.

Was this all bluff and bluster on Cuéllar’s part? Or was he articulating an argument that, instead of positing Chucho as an “obvious gay” because of his Oedipal upbringing and penchant for perfumes and fine clothing, was saying something more about the degradation of Mexican

⁸⁵ Cuéllar, *Historia de Chucho el Ninfo*, vol. 2, 140.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 138.

gender norms and the weakening of the honor-based public sphere? Indeed, it is hard to believe that these descriptions of Chucho's disregard for the women Cuéllar used were not critical to who he sought to portray Chucho as, i.e., a hypersexualized male. Hypersexuality during the 1800s was seen as localized in women, as part of their "nymphomania" or their *furor uterino* (uterine fury), their insatiable desire for sexuality.⁹⁰ As a *ninfo*, the masculinized version of *ninfa*—a term standing for a nymph, beautiful young woman, or a sexually liberated woman—Chucho was associated with such sexual licentiousness. He too was beautiful and narcissistic; he too was carnal. One could claim that he was essentially a *mafrito*, an effeminate male close to a hermaphrodite because of gender deviancy. This similarity with the young women, coupled with his confidence and suave style, ingratiated him into women's hearts and bedchambers.

Yet, could Chucho have been a satyr, rather than nymph? Was he a man afflicted with satyriasis, the corollary hypersexual condition for men? No, Chucho's similarity to the young women and his effeminacy—through consumption and use of fine products—made him different from the typical male hypersexual. Satyrs were depicted as (often) older, lascivious men who preyed on younger women or children; they were not effeminate in the least—since they were traditionally depicted with coarse beards—and often were seen as uncouth and rough in their appearance or actions, rather than dashing, as predators rather than seductors. For example, one satyr offered to buy a ten-year-old girl from a poor family for fifteen pesos in June 1896.⁹¹ Another satyr complimented a young woman in March 1899 as she walked from the flower market towards the Zócalo. Thinking that this *priopo* had earned him the right to touch her face,

⁹⁰ See Carol Groneman, *Nymphomania: A History*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 2000). *Ninfomanía* appears as a term in newspaper *El Siglo Diez y Nueve* on March 14, 1892; the page-one article "Juana de Nápoles, Ninfomanía, Clement VI y Urbano V" uses the term to describe the female sexual licentiousness and sordid tale of the young queen Joan I of Naples in the 14th century.

⁹¹ "Venta de una niña," *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*, June 8, 1896, 2.

he did so; in response, the young woman smashed him in the face with her bouquet. He then was chased off with some “stinging slaps” from her brother-in-law.⁹²

In contrast to these examples of satyrs, Chucho was suave and debonair; his vanity only increased his attractiveness to young women. Even his masculine attributes—such as his own beard—were feminized through the application of a glossy wax. If anything, Chucho’s portrayal was closer to that of the Don Juan or Casanova, of the perpetual womanizer who was attractive and seductive.⁹³ This is important, because it marks Chucho as a Mexican precursor to the debates on *donjuanismo* that appeared in Mexico, Spain, and elsewhere during the first half of the twentieth century and that would ultimately link hyper-heterosexuality with homosexuality.

At the turn of the century, a “Don Juan” in Mexico was understood as one might expect: a masculine, hypersexual male who could not control his passions and left damaged women in his wake. *El Imparcial* reported in June 1909 that two men, “sick from *donjuanismo*” were arrested for kidnapping two girls in Monte Alto.⁹⁴ *Nueva Era* discussed in November 1911 the “grave danger” that “professional, handsome young men who devote themselves to *donjuanismo* as a pastime” posed for “mislead maidens and abandoned fiancées”.⁹⁵

Yet, as early as 1913, shades of a new understanding of Don Juan and men like him began to emerge. In the poem “La America Loca”, printed in *El Imparcial* on June 2, 1913, Peruvian poet José Santos Chocano wrote described the tortured history of Latin America, the bloody conquest, and the excesses of colonial masters.⁹⁶ Towards the end of the poem, Chocano mentioned the “vile elegance of *donjuanismo*, oily, blasphemous, crazy...” and linked it to the

⁹² “Served Him Right,” *Mexican Herald*, March 31, 1899, 3.

⁹³ Perhaps he was even akin to the Marquis de Sade, if not as sadistic as the latter, due to his disregard for standards of behavior or virtue.

⁹⁴ “Dos hermanas fueron raptadas en Monte Alto,” *El Imparcial*, June 26, 1909, 7.

⁹⁵ “El matrimonio como contrato,” *Nueva Era*, November 17, 1911, 7.

⁹⁶ 1875-1934, Nicknamed the “Singer of the Americas”

previous colonial rule.⁹⁷ The poem thus linked elegance and hypersexuality together, thereby defining “don juans” as deviant and vile in more than one sense.⁹⁸ This perspective would have resonated with Mexican contemporaries, as the decadence of the Porfirian period was linked intimately to sexual excess and the undesirable influence of foreign cultures on Mexico.

It was Spanish sexologist Gregorio Marañón who would firmly link *donjuanismo* with homosexuality, as he did an analysis of Don Juan as a hypersexual man; rampant heterosexuality was actually a sign of homosexuality, in this view.⁹⁹ In Mexico, his ideas were picked up by the writers in *El Abogado Cristiano*, who argued in 1929 that Don Juan was “biological monstrosity” and who implored its readers to join in the “battle against *donjuanismo*” that could only be fought through “an intelligent, affectionate, and intense sexual education.” “Don Juan,” the publication reported, “is not, as has been believed, the MOST MANLY type of man, but rather is veritable *afeminado*.”¹⁰⁰ Moreover, their enthusiasm for sexual education and combating the queer threat of *donjuanismo* was legitimized because such a “prestigious and eminent man of science” as Marañón had articulated the connection. If the most *macho* icon of men was now suspect, the masculinity was truly in crisis and had to be defended, lest *afeminados* in masculine drag undermine Mexican society.

In 1936, Marañón’s idea of Don Juan as an *afeminado* reappeared in the Mexican press, this time in a column on theater. Once again, the association between hyper-heterosexual behaviors was made with homosexuality. Advised the column, women now had “a scientific argument in reach to demand fidelity from their husbands”; if they strayed, they could always be

⁹⁷ He foreshadowed Mexican scholars who looked towards the colonial period as the origin of Mexican identity.

⁹⁸ José Santos Chocano, “La America Loca,” *El Imparcial*, June 2, 1913, 3.

⁹⁹ See for example Gregorio Marañón, “Notas para la biología de Don Juan,” in *Obras Completas: Artículos* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, S.A., 1968).

¹⁰⁰ “Lección Juvenil de Acción Social, Boletín No. 9, ‘Don Juan, Monstruosidad biológica,’” *El Abogado Cristiano* (March 7, 1929): 7.

labeled as a closet *afeminado*.¹⁰¹ In other words, being a womanizer or asserting masculine privilege upon others sexually was *not*, as the active/passive paradigm would suggest, a sign of masculinity. Instead, it was part of the degradation of society.

In light of this trajectory of the significance of *donjuanismo*, it's relevant to return to the case of Chucho. In this reading, Chucho is a Don Juan, meticulous and elegant in his presentation, an irresistible heartthrob for women. He is also, therefore, sexually suspect, a hypersexual who is an *afeminado* in the sexually queer sense not just because of his fashion style, upbringing or manner of speaking, but because he spends his way through women as if they're currency. That's because the "very manly man is monogamous."¹⁰² Such a manly man was also someone who had managed to conquer his own "natural deviance." "Men are carnal, naturally devoted to their passions, slaves to their pride, and all born with the inclination to sin," reported *La Voz de México*; "they are naturally effeminate,¹⁰³ voluptuous, self-interested, vengeful, and quick-tempered."¹⁰⁴ Many of these traits Chucho shared, including hypersexuality, narcissism and effeminacy. And his excesses undermined his masculinity in the same ways through which Marañón disputed Don Juan's masculinity.

In sum, Chucho can be read as a harbinger of both anxieties over male effeminacy as presented in the dandy/gentleman form—or through "feminine" practices of consumption—as well as "stealth" homosexuality hidden behind a mask of hyper-masculine sexuality. He inhabits a proto-space: a potential "obvious gay" and a potential counterfeit man who upset gender norms at multiple levels. Cuéllar had indeed illuminated a "third sex", the *ninfo*. While distinct from the

¹⁰¹ "Notas teatrales," *El Nacional*, November 6, 1936, sec. 1, 4.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Term used is *afeminados*, and it is probably used here as an adjective, although possibly as a noun.

¹⁰⁴ "Domingo de Pentecostes o venida del espíritu santo," *La Voz de México*, June 3, 1900, 1. Note the reputation of voluptuousness associated with effeminacy, as alluded to in the previous chapter. The religious and scientific ideas of the time period were interestingly similar, in so far as there was a belief that individuals contained multiple "natural" states that had to be conquered; Marañón, for example, believed that men, by virtue of starting life as a female embryo, had to do war with the opposite sex within so as to emerge as a man.

later understanding of the “third sex”—in so far he, for all of his male effeminacy, remained interested in women, rather than men—Chucho nevertheless was a vision of an androgynous, intermediate sex that threatened Mexican masculinity. The same traits he possessed would label real individuals as “intersexual” in the coming decades.

Not a satyr, but a male nymph, a narcissistic male beauty, Chucho was the literary precursor of many real “types” during the early twentieth century, as well as the discourses used to describe and define them. Chief among these was the dandy, the conspicuous male consumer, who reveled in his own appearance and confidently pursued women with the zeal of a Don Juan. Chucho also preceded the queer dandy, the Wildean types of men like Salvador Novo in the 1920s who relished both elegant fashion and sexual excess. Finally, although he was not as obvious of a “gay” as Monsiváis suggested, he nevertheless was the literary ancestor to the men arrested in November 1901 at their infamous ball: an effeminate male who luxuriated in fine clothing and self-presentation, who possessed means of speaking different from the norm in similar ways to how later *afeminados* would be judged in terms of their speech-patterns. But he also was distinct and in which the convergence of gender and sexuality still had not been fully completed. *Chucho el ninfo* was thus an early attempt to come to terms with the influence that modernity would wreak in Mexican society, an effort to understand the destabilization of sex/gender norms ongoing as a process of development, urbanization, and “progress”. It was a work that showcased the traits that would inhere to the homosexual “types” of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The inability for his critics in the novel to understand both his appeal, as well as his own zeal for conspicuous consumption and sex, would be mirrored in the consternation of observers in later decades who struggled to make sense of the dandy, the transvestite, and the “intersexual”, of the intermediate sexes and homosexuals, of the social and

congenital influences that were associated with divergent sex/gender identities and behaviors.

V. Homosociality and the Fin-de-siècle Nation

One of the reasons that male effeminacy was such a threat was because it undermined the basis of nineteenth-century relationships: homosociality between male equals. For many Mexican writers in the nineteenth century, homosocial bonding, affection between men, and masculine fraternity, rather than heterosexual love, that were the ideal foundations of post-Independence Mexican society.¹⁰⁵ Such bonds between men—including age-stratified bonds between more experienced men and youths—helped create patriarchy. Women, in contrast, could have a “perverting” or “distracting” effect on men, whether as objects of their desire or as those who most influenced education; such biases would remain in the twentieth century, particularly as groups sought the “causes” of homosexuality; women were frequently blamed.

Yet this position could only work if the men themselves were “normal.” Irwin presented several examples of intense male bonding in novels, from homoerotic initiation scenes to ardent passion between two drunken men; of course, the novels leave out many details, but there is plenty of innuendo. National bonds between different races, classes, and political positions are forged through these homosocial relationships. Indeed,

it is relations between men that most often allegorize the literary national integration so vociferously promoted by Mexico’s leading cultural figures. The ubiquitous homosocial (and often homoerotic) bonding between men is *the* foundational trope in nineteenth-century Mexican literature.¹⁰⁶

Rather than the *macho* of twentieth century stereotypes, which is criticized as “false and vulgar”, the “*hombre de bien*, the honest and loyal friend, the social do-gooder that presents a model of Mexican masculinity.” Such a man is presented not as the “wise and generous father figure” but

¹⁰⁵ See his first chapter “Early Paradoxes of Masculinity and Male Homosocial Bonding.”

¹⁰⁶ Irwin, *Mexican Masculinities*, 47.

instead as “a more youthful man, more committed to friendships and love affairs than to marriage and family, who most often protagonizes the literature of the era.”¹⁰⁷

However, following Eve Sedgwick’s *Between Men*, homosocial relationships occurred on a continuum of homosocial desire that included homoerotic behaviors.¹⁰⁸ And if relationships could fall into more than homosocial interactions, masculinity itself could be undermined. By marking another male as effeminate, a nineteenth-century critic thus marked the other as unfit for the fraternal bonds and homosocial/erotic relationships that were foundational to the patriarchal *patria*. An effeminate man was thus in a similar position as a woman, and women were not allowed in the homosocial spaces of national formation, which as were, at least in literature, dominated by expressions of male intimacy, affection, camaraderie, and suggestive nudity. Interjecting an effeminate male into that situation upset the balance and made legible the homoerotic possibilities that had been previously closeted.

One of the ways that men were marked unfit as leaders or partners for fraternal bonds was through visual representations of deviance—whether real or alleged—that enabled a wider legibility on what was normative and what was not. These images would foreshadow the explosion of representations, tropes, and visual metaphors deployed in the following century. Political cartoons were—and would remain—a popular medium through which to make these distinctions. For example, they occasionally portrayed a famous Mexican in drag. In one cartoon, Porfirio Díaz and Justo Benítez are shown as part of a scene from the comic opera *Madame Angot*; Sierra wanted to succeed Díaz in office, and both are shown in dresses. In 1879, various journalists and political elites were shown as characters from the operetta *El Máscara*; several men are shown in dresses, all the while maintaining their beards or mustaches. And, in 1882,

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

prominent members of the political class during Manuel González's government are shown in petticoats and dresses dancing during their electoral visit to Chalco, a site east of Mexico City.¹⁰⁹ Robert Buffington has asserted that casting political opponents in drag was par-for-the-course in the Mexican press, particularly that of the opposition. Writing about the later Porfirian period in 1900, he noted that "Whatever the reason, cross-dressing politicians in political cartoons apparently fell within the realm of acceptable editorial practice in an age when slander against a high public official landed many penny press editors in Belem." Buffington cautioned that such cross-dressing was about highlighting certain traits—such as the vanity of a politician like Díaz—rather than casting an aspersion about their sexuality. In other words, the satiric press used such images to make metaphorical connections between men and effeminacy, rather than making overt references to homosexuality; such images were thus, according to Buffington, only marginally homophobic.¹¹⁰

In contrast, I want to offer an alternative, if not oppositional, reading. At the time that the cartoons mentioned above were appearing in the Mexican press, concerns over the fate of the nation, the success or failure of republican virtues and institutions, and the feminization of Mexican males had been ongoing for decades. Corruption in politics also was well known, and even though the centralization of the government under Díaz brought stability, citizenship was still exclusive, rather than a universal right. By cross-dressing politicians and opponents, the cartoonists engaged in a process of trying to undermine the masculine credibility of the men, insofar as such credibility was understood as part of the men's role as major figures in the

¹⁰⁹ These images are reprinted as plate numbers 86, 60, and 25, respectively, in Rafael Barajas Durán, *El país de 'el Llorón de Icamole': Caricatura mexicana de combate y libertad de imprenta durante los gobiernos de Porfirio Díaz y Manuel González (1877-1884)* (Mexico, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2007). The originals are from *La Historia Cantante*, October 12, 1878, *El Máscara*, September 30, 1879, and *El Rascatripas*, February 19, 1882.

¹¹⁰ Rob Buffington, "Homophobia and the Mexican Working Class, 1900-1910," in *The Famous 41: Sexuality and Social Control in Mexico, 1901*, ed. Robert McKee Irwin, Edward J. McCaughan, and Michelle Rocio Nasser (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 179.

political and public spheres. Marking them as effeminate also undermined their fitness to lead the nation by situating them within the genealogy of decadence and vice described above.

Thus, since effeminacy remained a concern in the press and since sodomy had not disappeared from public discourse, such men were unfit to rule because of their vices and selfishness—traits linked to both—tore at the fabric of Mexican republicanism, particularly as imagined through virility. As Irwin as argued, there was a struggle “to assert and sustain, through literature, an image of Mexico as virile.”¹¹¹ This was due to the fact that

In a country whose most important national icons were female (the Virgin of Guadalupe, symbol of Mexican independence; la Malinche, emblem of the conquest and *mestizaje*), it was necessary to establish a truly virile culture.¹¹²

Virile culture was to be the antithesis of Mexico’s previous status as “a subjugated, morally and physically weak, even effeminate” colonized territory. Thus, the cartoons were salvos in defining a masculine, virtuous Mexico against the specter of effeminacy and vice.¹¹³

As I have already shown, by 1871, such men could actually act on their homoerotic impulses legally. The problem for homosocial/erotic relationships, however, was when sodomy, even when legal, became even more associated with male effeminacy and the emergent queer types of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Once male-male intimacy became something associated with vice, crime, and depravity, the previous formulations of masculinity entered a crisis; by century’s end, sexual intimacy between men, which had always been a possible undercurrent in the homosocial public sphere, was collapsed with the effeminate male stereotype and with the decadence and unfitness for status within the public sphere with which effeminacy had long been associated. The Famous 41 was the climax of this process.

¹¹¹ Irwin, *Mexican Masculinities*, 1-2.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 1.

¹¹³ Ironically, since *patria* is a feminine world, having a virile Mexico implies some sort of hermaphroditism or gender building.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated, in a preliminary way, the existence of nineteenth-century case files, newspaper reports, literary sources, and references in penal codes to sodomy, as well as the gradual changes in the legal, political, and cultural understandings of male effeminacy and what would later be described as homosexual behavior, i.e., the transition from sodomy to pederasty and “moral outrages.” I have argued, then, that understandings of gender and sexual deviance were not as separate as has been previously argued. I also argued how sodomy was a possible subtext in denunciations of men and governments for their effeminacy and decadence and the danger that male effeminacy posed for homosocial bonding, particularly if it was viewed as the foundation of national identity.

Gender (and sexual) indeterminacy would come to be a concern that fed into the dismantling of the homosocial public sphere as it was described in Mexican literature and discourses on honor, virility, and citizenship. As early as the 1840s, queer gender types were recognized and commented upon in the Mexican press. For example, in 1842, *El Siglo Diez y Nueve* published in its “Variedades” (Varieties) section a piece detailing the existence of non-normative sex/gendered types:

As there are men so effeminate that the ablest naturalist would see himself hindered in determining their sex, if they did not have beards; in a word, as there are *marimaricas*, so too there are mannish women with the inclinations and habits of a grenadier (*granadero*).

What is important in this definition is that gender performance was being seen as separate from the biological sex of the individuals in question; so convincing were such performances that without certain biological signs—such as a beard—their sex could not be determined.¹¹⁴ Their

¹¹⁴ The portrayal of queer men with mustaches and wearing dresses would be enshrined by the Famous 41 scandal in 1901 and would become a familiar trope thereafter.

gender performances occluded their biological sex, making them a distinct type—the *marimarica* and “mannish woman”—because they did not correspond to their biological sex. Thus, this article documents an early example of the medicalization of sex/gender norms in Mexico, and already there is an appeal to an authority, i.e., the naturalist who would be able to express his expertise on matters of biology, who can cut through the “gender trouble” and ensure that the “natural” order is restored. Moreover, the definition raised the problem of transvestism, i.e., the inability to determine the real sex of an individual on the basis of their gender performance or due to the obfuscating influences of such a performance; this is the subject of the next chapter.

Another piece in *El Siglo Diez y Nueve* in 1851 again mentioned queer gender performances. Entitled “Afectaciones de las mujeres” (Affectations of Women); the piece, translated from the original English, described the ongoing debate between the author—a man named Chesterfield—and women who had rebuked previous columns. The author wondered why it was not just for men to label women as *marimachos*—when they “adopt the same characters as the masculine sex”—as women would label any man who worked in “certain women’s professions” as a *maricón*. It is unlikely that the original text used these Spanish words; nevertheless, the translation of other terms into these terms show how gender non-conformity was beginning to be seen as more than a descriptive attribute—i.e., that someone had manly or effeminate attributes. Instead, such non-conformity was expressed by individuals who could be recognized as a type of person, i.e., the *maricón* and the *marimacho*. Such “types” would then become associated with a range of attributes, including effeminacy in the case of men and masculinity in the case of women, as well as sexuality over time. The question is, when did such types aggregate new definitions to them?

Throughout most of the nineteenth century, *maricón* was defined by the Real Academia

Española (RAE) as an “effeminate man and coward”, as well as “lazy”. The term, an insult and pejorative, was derived from *marica*, itself defined as “effeminate man” and one who lacked “animus and strength”, and it in turn derived from “Maria”, i.e., the ideas surrounding Mary.¹¹⁵ However, by at least 1889, dictionaries in Spain were defining *maricón* also as a sodomite.¹¹⁶ Similarly, the RAE’s 1899 dictionary likewise defined the two terms together.¹¹⁷ Previously, the sex act—sodomy—had been something that could be defined separately from the gender performance—effeminacy—although it should be noted that it was not *necessary* to do so. They were not necessarily separate, even if they could be. By the 1880s, such a separation had disappeared, or at the very least, diminished.

In Mexico, the *Diccionario de mejicanismos* (1898) defined numerous local terms related to queer men. These included numerous terms describing male effeminacy, including the adjectives *fresco* (Michoacán), *güitalolo* (Jalisco), *joto* (Distrito Federal), and, in a supplement, *alfarero* (Veracruz) all of which were defined as synonymous with *afeminado*.¹¹⁸ *Mafrito* a term used in Veracruz, also was synonymous with *afeminado*, as well as with had the additional meaning of “useless” or “cowardly”. This term was a corruption of the term *hermafrodita*, and it was also found in another form—*manflorito*—in Guerrero and Michoacán.¹¹⁹ In the Yucatán and Campeche, two words were defined as both a noun and adjective meaning *afeminado*: *xmabén* and *xmaric*, the latter also synonymous with *marica*.¹²⁰ These terms show the shifting lexical landscape of Mexican understandings of gender and sexual deviancy, a process involving the

¹¹⁵ These definitions can be found in the editions throughout the century.

¹¹⁶ Eduardo de Echegaray, *Diccionario general etimológico de la lengua española*, vol. 4 (Madrid: Álvarez Hermanos, Impresores, 1889), 256.

¹¹⁷ Real Academia Española, *Diccionario de la lengua castellana*, décimatercia. (Madrid: Imprenta de los Sres. Hernando y Compañía, 1899), 637.

¹¹⁸ Ricardo Gomez, *Diccionario de mejicanismos* (Mexico, D.F.: Herrero Hermanos, Editores, 1898), 279, 298, 336, and 574.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 357.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 529.

transition from a description of a quality—being effeminate—to one of a type—being an *afeminado*. In the dictionary's supplement, *fresco*, which in nearby Michoacán was an adjective, was a noun in Jalisco:

Fresco: (Jal.), sm, *Afeminado*, *sodomita pasivo* (masculine noun, effeminate male/fairy, passive sodomite)¹²¹

As the definition of this term shows, effeminacy and sodomy had been collapsed together into the same “type” of individual by the end of the period; this process would be dramatically reinforced by the Famous 41 scandal just three years later. Within the next few decades, other terms would become directly associated with homosexuality, much as *fresco* had become in Jalisco already in 1898. *Manflorito* was defined in 1934 by *Investigaciones Lingüísticas* as the noun “*afeminado*”.¹²² *Mafrío* in 1946 was defined as a *cobrarde o afeminado* (coward or fairy) by *La Crítica* magazine in 1946.¹²³ The term *afeminado* itself was used as a noun in the early 1900s and was widespread as a term denoting homosexual males by the 1930s.

Tracing when this change exactly occurred is challenging; nevertheless, the process whereby adjectives describing effeminacy became linked to types of persons known for both such characteristics and sexuality was underway in the nineteenth century. That it was is yet more evidence that the nineteenth century was not devoid either of discussions of sodomy, as Monsiváis stated, nor the association of non-normative gender and sexuality together, if not exclusively so. Nor were gender and sexuality clearly aligned in an active/passive binary, calling into question the presumed continuities from the colonial period to the twentieth century. Simply because someone was a sodomite did not mean they were effeminate, nor did being a *maricón* mean that one was necessarily a sodomite; heterosexual males, too, could be “effeminate.”

¹²¹ Ibid., 574.

¹²² Marcos E. Becerra, “Observaciones sobre los 'otros 469 errores del diccionario de Madrid',” *Investigaciones Lingüísticas* II, no. 5 (November 1934): 405.

¹²³ “Diccionario Enciclopédico de la “Crítica”, Madeja-Magnate,” *La Crítica*, January 15, 1946, 6.

However, by the end of the century, sodomy and effeminacy were more fully linked, even if such a link only was but one stereotypical example of the variety of queer roles that men inhabited, others of which went relatively unnoticed. Following the 1901 Famous 41 scandal, this link would become paramount in the thinking of Mexican reformers and the public, and male effeminacy and homosexuality would help define what the post-revolutionary nation was and was not. Virility would be enshrined as a defining characteristic of citizenship. How these changes occurred comprise the following chapters.

Chapter 2: Homosexuality, Transvestism, and Nation, 1900-1920

After the 1871 decriminalization of sodomy, new means of detecting sexual deviance were devised that could still criminalize homosexual behaviors. As described in Chapter 1, these included gendered behaviors, appearances, and identities that did not fit into a model of the virile citizen subject. In addition, deviant sexuality was made a “public” crime (which went precisely against the spirit of decriminalizing sodomy because it was a private act). Following the 1901 scandal, any effeminate action by a man risked being coded as homosexual because effeminacy and homosexuality had been collapsed together by the reactions to the events on La Paz street. Because some of the most visible queer men in fin-de-siècle Mexico were those who took on the personas, mannerisms, behaviors, and appearances more regularly associated with women, they would become symbols of the decadence and degradation of Porfirian society, as well as an important justification for reorganizing society along more “virile” lines.

Indeed, the period between 1900-1920 can be seen as one in which concerns over masculinity and homosexuality oriented discourses on the nation and citizenship before and during the Revolution, as well as the various ways that the competing factions exercised state power against groups considered unfit for the post-Revolutionary nation. Catholic, Protestant, and non-religious critics all saw homosexuals as a “social plague” and problem. This is why the legacy of the Famous 41 would reverberate throughout society, making the scandal one of the first salvos in the Revolution against the Porfiriato. This is also why attempts by Porfirians to simultaneously embrace a modernity influenced by transnational ideas of androgyny and conspicuous consumption and to repress homosexuals, who were the vanguard of that modernity, ultimately failed and did not satiate critics of the regime.

This chapter investigates this tumultuous period in four parts. First, I look at transvestism, how it was understood within the public sphere and how it was practiced by Mexican men

between 1900-1920. I argue that transvestism became seen as the homosexual trait par excellence, and its previous association with decadent culture (in the form of elite balls) disqualified it as a form of masculine behavior for those seeking to erase Porfirian excesses in the lead up to and during the Revolution. Second, I look at discourses on how best to make virile citizens. These debates were the precursors to the contentious debates of the 1920s and 1930s on the Mexican “new man,” a virile citizen/patriarch. Indeed, the period was marked by a new synergy that equated consumption, effeminacy, and homosexuality as part of the same degeneration that the Revolution would excise from Mexican society.

Third, I show how roundups of homosexuals were a priority for administrations before and during the Revolution, showing a continuity of thought regarding the “otherness” of homosexual men, even as political control changed hands multiple times after 1910. I also show that despite negative discourses and roundups, men continued holding “reprises” of the Famous 41, which in the homophobic aftermath of 1901 must be considered as having political meaning. Resistance to *machista* culture, from walking in a working-class neighborhood in drag or challenging the legal grounds of arrest, occurred across classes. Finally, I conclude with a case study on the Alameda, a site used by multiple types of Mexicans where the homosexual social sphere overlapped with that of mainstream society. In such a site, concerns over nation converged with men’s quotidian desires for sex and companionship.

This chapter relies on fragments from archival, periodical, literary, and other sources. Like in each of my chapters, such a broad source base helps to show both the place of queerness in Mexican society and to speak to the experiences of queer Mexicans, whether elite or “from below.” This chapter offers a model on how to do this sort of reconstructive history; while scholars like Irwin have claimed we can know little to nothing of queer life in the early 1900s,

close readings of these sources—as well as analysis, some inference, and educated speculation—provide ample evidence of both homosexuality as a discourse and experience before 1920. Even official and periodical sources critical of homosexuality can offer important evidence.¹

I. Transvestism and Society, 1880-1920

The association of transvestism and deviant sexuality only increased after the scandal of November 1901, in large part due to press sensationalism, as well as the famous prints produced by engraver José Posada.² This is not to say that transvestite homosexuals were the only visible type or the only form of “effeminate” queer men; dandies were also prominent. But fear of—and fascination with—the gender-bending male was particularly prevalent after the scandal, and the man-in-drag would be a recurring trope in definitions of what the Mexican masculine citizen was increasingly defined as not. This was because the scandal created Mexico’s first major “homosexual panic”, a moment that Carlos Monsiváis called the “birth” of Mexican homosexuality. This was when transvestism and homosexuality became defined together in the same individual type: the effeminate, often cross-dressing homosexual. Men in drag were thus immortalized *as homosexuals* and homosexuals *as men-in-drag*.³

Here it is relevant to define my terms. I build on Ben Sifuentes-Jauregui’s definition of transvestism, a performance of gender that for the “transvestitic subject” is “about representing the Self,” “about becoming the Self,” and about (re)creating the Self.” In other words,

¹ The inferences and interpretative speculations below are based on my own understanding of the *longue durée* of queerness in Mexico from the late nineteenth century through the twentieth century, as well as my assertion that Mexico developed concurrent forms of queer identities simultaneously to and often in some sort of contact with those developing in other metropolises. Moreover, I demonstrate in this chapter how even official and press sources can be used as queer archives to get closer to the experiences of previously unheard subalterns.

² See the Introduction for more on the Famous 41 Scandal.

³ See Carlos Monsiváis, “The 41 and the Gran Redada,” in *The Famous 41: Sexuality and Social Control in Mexico, 1901*, ed. Robert McKee Irwin, Edward J. McCaughan, and Michelle Rocio Nasser (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 139-168. See also Carlos Monsiváis, “Ortodoxia y heterodoxia en las alcobas,” *Debate Feminista* 6, no. 11 (April 1995): 183-212.

“transvestite subjects do not necessarily imagine themselves becoming some other subject, but rather they may conceive of transvestism as an act of self realization.” Indeed, “transvestism is an operating strategy that deconstructs a specific ‘normality’ in a gender binary and hierarchy.”⁴

On the other hand, for the outside viewer, transvestism has alternative meanings, including the representation of the “other,” meaning it can be both a way to create the self and for societies to mark those they consider deviant and outside the bounds of citizenship or normalcy.

Transvestism, thus, lies at the intersection of the self as created by individuals and groups and the “other” as an object created by a disapproving public interested in defining what it is and what it is most certainly not. In sum, the process of “straight” society delineating the queer other lies hand-in-hand with the self-definition of that other by queer individuals and groups, and these twin processes mutually reinforce each other.

Beyond Carnival: Transvestism Before 1901

In his article “Anything Goes: Carnavalesque Transgressions in Nineteenth-Century Latin America,” historian John Charles Chasteen asserted that Carnival—the three days prior to the somber, austere season of Lent every spring—was a time in which social, racial, and gender inversions could occur, challenges against norms could be made, and even transgressions of the norms could happen that would result in lasting social change.⁵ This was because such celebrations “facilitat[ed] fecund cultural contact across lines of race, class, and gender.”⁶

Carnival was celebrated in two primary forms throughout much of Latin America by the 1840s: a masked-ball, festival sort common in European cities like Venice and a regional form involving

⁴ Ben. Sifuentes-Jáuregui, *Transvestism, Masculinity, and Latin America Literature: Genders Share Flesh*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 3-4.

⁵ Chasteen asserts that an inversion of social norms changed nothing, just left the original hierarchy in place, while transgressions offered opportunities for social revision.

⁶ John Charles Chasteen, “Anything Goes: Carnavalesque Transgressions in Nineteenth-Century Latin America,” in *Building Nineteenth-Century Latin America: Re-Rerooted Cultures, Identities, and Nations*, ed. William G. Acree Jr. and Juan Carlos González Espitia (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009), 134.

water fights between young men and women.⁷ In both cases, gender norms were subverted, but the former type also involved the possibility of cross-dressing. Indeed, “cross-dressing—an inversive gesture as well as a transgressive one—was more common than any symbolic inversion of the larger social hierarchy, from quite early on.”⁸ Yet, these sorts of cross-dressing transgressions were largely confined during the three days; such inversions and transgressions were not tolerated at other times.⁹

However, in the two decades leading up to the Famous 41 scandal, transvestism became featured beyond Carnival festivals, appearing at masked balls and high-society parties at other times of the year.¹⁰ This was a significant change as it separated the socially transgressive potential of cross-dressing from a single period of the year and made it available for social events—including official events—that were not originally carnivalesque. As early as May 1884, *El Monitor Republicano* reported on transvestism, noting that in one grand dance held in the national theater, women dressed as men danced with other women, rather than with the copious numbers of men available who looked on.¹¹ The columnist noted that by the following year, the aficionados of the masked balls would be dancing “man with man” as part of the carnivalesque vogue; while distasteful, the author seemed to believe that such a reality was inevitable.¹² A decade later, male transvestism was a featured part of Porfirian high-society; one formal ball

⁷ Chasteen, “Anything Goes.” In Mexico, Carnival celebrations can be seen as early as the 1830s if not before in the newspaper coverage.

⁸ Ibid., 136.

⁹ Certainly they occurred, but they did so in more isolated instances.

¹⁰ For copious discussions of masked and “travesti” balls, see both volumes of Clementina Díaz y de Ovando, *Invitación al baile: Arte, espectáculo y rito en la sociedad mexicana* (Mexico: UNAM, 2006). As masquerade type Carnival parties became fashionable across class lines, the elites started cordoning off their own events. Chasteen, “Anything Goes,” 139.

¹¹ This is a remarkable example of female transvestism, and it suggests the presence of female-female queer identity and community at the time.

¹² Juvenal, “Charla de los domingos,” *El Monitor Republicano*, May 9, 1884, 1. A week earlier, another dance featured mostly men as well, leading the author to call it a dance of “single men”; such disparities between the numbers of men and women at dances, as well as the tolerance for transvestism, may have influenced the development of male transvestism at similar balls. See “Charla de los domingos,” *El Monitor Republicano*, May 2, 1884.

(called a *baile travesti* by newspaper *El Universal* and a *baile de fantasia* by *El Correo Español*) on September 5, 1894 was presided over by Federal District governor Pedro Rincón Gallardo and his wife. In attendance were Porfirio Díaz, wearing his dress uniform, Secretaría de Gobernación D. Manuel Romero Rubio (also in dress uniform) and the Porfirian court, many who were dressed elaborately. Several costumes were notable for their “elegance, originality, and eccentricity”. Among these were men in drag: Santiago Morfi, dressed as a ballerina and F. Algara as a “*demoiselle compagnie*”, i.e., a young lady-in-waiting.¹³ Both men were among those listed in *El Universal*’s report as having the most striking, praise-worthy costumes.

Male transvestism became such an art in such parties that straight men could be duped into thinking a man was a woman. At another party, a German diplomatic attaché presented himself to Díaz “disguised as a woman with such perfection that the President greeted him by kissing his hand.” Upon learning that the young “woman” was instead a man, Díaz said nothing, but later must have expressed his displeasure to the German ambassador, as the young man was gone from the party site by morning.¹⁴ Yet, there is no further mention of the event, not major political fallout, no public scandal made of the queer interaction between the Mexican dictator and the German attaché; transvestism had yet to become truly threatening, and the “duping” was written off as a humorous error. And so, the balls would continue.

These balls were part of the Porfirian enthusiasm for modernity, which in this case involved heavy foreign investment in infrastructure that simultaneously expanded Mexico’s export-driven economy but also made the nation dependent on global markets. This first stage of

¹³ Díaz y de Ovando, *Invitación al baile*, 469-471.

¹⁴ Victoriano Salado Álvarez, *Memorias: Tiempo nuevo* (Mexico, D.F.: Edición y Distribución Ibero Americana de Publicaciones, S.A., 1946), 74-75. Salado Álvarez was at one time the foreign minister of Mexico, and this citation is from his memoirs. It is possible that this is the same dance as previously described, although the frequency of similar masquerade balls leads me to suspect that this was a separate instance, which means the venerable dictator attended at least two dances in which transvestism occurred.

modernity was an ambivalent and ambiguous period, marked by inequalities that would ultimately drive the tensions of the early 1900s. For example, new technologies like electricity, streetcars, and automobiles appeared in Mexican cities, but these were enjoyed mostly by the rich who reveled in the economy's phenomenal growth but who kept the majority of wealth for themselves. The wealthy splurged on mansions in fashionable neighborhoods in urban centers, flocked to foreign universities, and took grand tours through Europe and the United States.¹⁵ The participated, then, in transnational circuits of consumption and identity for which the rest of Mexican society would have to wait another couple of decades in order to get a taste. Naturally, *los de abajo*—those at the bottom—saw corruption and broken promises, as the Porfirian period saw unequal prosperity, as well as unequal development, with certain economic sectors becoming profitable and others remaining as they had been for generations.

The balls that involved men in drag were part of this exuberant, elite, transnational modernity. Queer men—in this case, men who participated in cultures dominated by homosexual interactions—frequented both elite parties, as well as their own at the turn of the century. In his memoirs, Salvador Novo described the story of Antonio Adalid, the son of a groom to former Emperor Maximilian, godson by baptism to the Mexican emperors, and member of an ancient and wealthy family.¹⁶ He had been educated in England and returned to Mexico both in his youth and in the prime of Porfirian social life, becoming the “soul of those parties” and known as “Toña la Mamonera” (Toña the Fellatrix) for his oral sexual skills.¹⁷ At one party hosted by Toña, men from different social classes mingled in large part because “recruiters” like Madre Meza—who scoured the streets of the Centro for men who could be enticed for a pittance—

¹⁵ For a detailed look at the period, see Robert M. Buffington and William E. French, “The Culture of Modernity,” in *The Oxford History of Mexico* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁶ Novo himself was too young to have attended such galas, but heard the stories about them while socializing with older queer men who had attended them.

¹⁷ Salvador Novo, *La estatua de sal* (Mexico: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1998), 109.

brought some of their latest finds with them. Later in the evening, Toña descended the stairs sumptuously attired as a ballerina, his grand entrance earning thunderous applause. However, at the bottom of the stairs,

the silent reproach of two eyes froze him, arrested him. It seemed to insult him: ‘Ridiculous old man!’ Toña went back up the stairs to take off the costume, then descended, looking for the handsome young man who had silently rebuked him. At that moment, the young man was being auctioned to the highest bidder. Antonio bought him. His name was also Antonio. He was not yet 20.¹⁸

Such parties were sites to find sex and potential relationships, as well as sites where wealthier men—who could afford to lavishly cross-dress—sought to “purchase” the younger “recruits” and induct them into the queer community. Indeed, during the 1901 scandal, one of the most damning charges levied against the men involved was that they were raffling off an elegant teenage boy.¹⁹ Some, like the younger Antonio, would be socialized completely into the queer life.²⁰ In this way, the balls served a similar function as the carnival festivals: they facilitated connections across societal lines. It is reasonable to conclude that transvestism occurring in other sectors of Mexican society was influenced by such events, as young men would see individuals like Toña in his glory and would return to their own social spheres with that knowledge. Transvestism would have been aspirational in this sense, a means of declaring one’s affinity for high-society life and an attempt to reject one’s own class status for an identity allowed by the modernity enjoyed by the wealthier classes.

Over time, the press response to drag and masquerade balls would become more negative—likely due to the increasing visibility of cross-dressing men—although not as sensationalized or strident as it would be in 1901. For example, on January 21, 1896, *El Nacional*

¹⁸ Ibid. There was a 23-year age difference between the men.

¹⁹ Monsiváis, “The 41 and the Gran Redada,” 147.

²⁰ Novo described that despite the initial negative interaction, the two Antonios became long-term lovers; the younger man also began indulging in more sumptuous wear, such as wearing a kimono when he awoke from his siesta.

cited an article in *El Diario* regarding a “suspicious house” located near the center of the city. This house, which was in a “ruinous state”, had been colonized by the most “prostituted and criminal people” and was a site of “clandestine balls [and] scandalous fights” among other offensive occurrences. Indeed at the time of the article’s printing, the house’s resident population included a “gang of *afeminados*” who had recently moved in. Reported the newspaper, “they are devoted to masking themselves as women and going out into the street amid the most frightful booing; if the gendarmes chase them, they come running to hide themselves in their lair, closing the door to the street.”²¹ A year later, at 7:30 pm on February 7, 1897, police apprehended Pedro Castillo, “dressed as a woman”, along the Mirador de la Alameda, a street adjacent to Mexico City’s central park. Castillo was taken to the Sixth precinct, according to *El Imparcial*. There, “they took from him some petticoats, a jacket, and a shawl.”²²

These two articles present early examples of queer men defined as a “type”—i.e., as *afeminados* pertaining to class of individual, for anyone watching or reading, recognizably queer in sexual and gender terms. Given that transvestism had continued to be relatively accepted among the elite classes, the criticism of the *afeminados* at the “suspicious house” may have been a reflection of the men’s lower social or political status, particularly since they were described as “prostituted and criminal”, and therefore, free game for ridicule in the press. People on the street did not accept them either, and the booing they received was in sharp contrast to the applause that individuals like F. Algara or Antonio Adalid received at the elite masquerade balls.²³

Likewise, Castillo’s arrest was partly due to his causing a public “moral outrage” like the *afeminados* from the suspicious house made with their forays into the street. These forays were

²¹ “Una casa sospechosa,” *El Nacional*, January 21, 1896, 3. Note: I have yet to locate the article from *El Diario* due to accessibility issues.

²² “¡Que chistoso!,” *El Imparcial*, February 8, 1897, 2.

²³ It also foreshadowed the treatment that *afeminados* would receive in subsequent years when rounded up and either taken to police precincts or relegated away from the capital to the Islas Marias penal colony.

dangerous because they contaminated the male-dominated public sphere with effeminacy and sexual ambiguity that were supposed to be bounded by domestic confines, rather than visible.

As such, it is surprising that more was not made of the men, their scandalous behavior, and their “lair”. Why, for example, did the police not raid the house and prosecute the men? And although Castillo was arrested for walking in women’s clothing, the article describes him with a tone of amusement, rather than overt disdain; why did it not condemn him and mock him more thoroughly like later periodicals would similar men? A possible answer was that while gradually becoming associated with distasteful behavior, transvestism still enjoyed a measure of tolerance in the public sphere, whether as part of social scenes, dances, or, importantly, the theater; it was not yet the primary concern it would become just a few years later.²⁴

Moreover, within the same year as the two articles cited above, a different, more positive perspective on transvestism was expressed in the Mexican press about Italian stage-actor Leopoldo (Luigi) Fregoli’s appearance at the El Principal theater. In their review of Fregoli’s performance, *La Voz de México* stated that he was a truly “rare, unique, exceptional man”. He was a one-man acting company for whom “There is not a dramatic situation that he cannot represent, character he cannot imitate, nor accent he cannot modulate. An immense crowd has attended his performances, filling the Principal’s every seat.” The newspaper noted that he rapidly appeared “correctly dressed as a woman, just as he presented himself to us as a ‘dandy’; and likewise, he imitated the voice of a soprano as well as the robust accents of the tenor.”²⁵ If modernity was a period of possibility and mutability—where “all that is solid melts into air,” in Marshal Berman’s terms—then Fregoli embodied them on stage, breaking down barriers between human types and genders and linking the transnational to process.

²⁴ For their part, police may have had greater concerns than a few men in drag, and since such behavior was part of the culture of modernity in the regime they served, it was tolerated.

²⁵ “Crónica de la semana,” *La Voz de México*, December 15, 1896, 1.

La Voz de México was a Catholic opposition newspaper, yet instead of criticizing the gender bending, the reviewer praised Fregoli's performance and the success he had sliding from one gender position to another. Fregoli's performance highlighted the mutability of gender and sex norms; while occurring in the "safe" space of the theater, he nevertheless demonstrated how a man could be a convincing woman or how gender was not solid, but largely based on performance. Such performances called into question the bifurcation of the sexes, and, in their way, jived with the emerging understandings of intersexuality beginning to circulate in medical and criminological discourses. That this confluence of challenges to the gendered order was not commented upon suggests that transvestism was not yet truly the threat it would become; perhaps the theater's "fourth wall" also mitigated Fregoli's performance being read as dangerous. Fregoli, after all, was "just" posing, just playing at being something and using inversions to his benefit, while not "truly" being what he portrayed. The Famous 41, however, would demolish that wall, removing the fantasy of "safety" that individuals like *La Voz de México*'s reviewer could rely upon while enjoying the scopophilia of transvestite spectacles, i.e., the fantasy that they too would not be seduced in reality by the queer man in drag.

Importantly, Fregoli's performance contained two harbingers of how queer men would be understood in twentieth century Mexico: the *afeminado* tropes of the man-in-drag/transvestite and the effeminate dandy. Like in the character of Chucho el Ninfo, Fregoli used performance and costume to disrupt the stability of the gendered order. It is worth speculation that, for queer men in the audience and for those who saw photographs or read about the performance in the papers, the skill that Fregoli deployed was an inspiration for their own forays into transvestism, much like the performances of beautiful starlets would be within a few years (and which are described below). Fregoli would appear, interestingly enough, again in Mexico a short time

before the Famous 41 scandal. While his performance was once again popular, it was safely conducted behind the theater's fourth wall; the amateur performances put on by the Famous 41 a few days later would be denigrated, as would subsequent transvestism, because they represented more than a man posing as a woman: they represented a queer identity. Their fantasies, personas, and posings were all too real for critics, while those of Fregoli were "just" a performance.

In the Introduction, I discussed the Famous 41 case that occurred on November 17, 1901. What made the event so scandalous was the presence of approximately 19 men dressed in drag dancing with other men. While questions would be raised about whether or not the men who appeared "normal" were queer, those who were cross-dressing left little doubt in the minds of an increasingly sensational press. As part of the coverage of the event, the sordid details of the high-society parties during the Porfirian period became known: the elaborate costumes and single-sex balls; the raffling-off of beautiful youths—which demonstrated the threat posed to the nation's future citizens; and the association of queer behavior with the regime itself, as localized in the presence of Díaz's son-in-law at the party.

Before the event, transvestism was for the most part something that was viewed as frivolous, deviant, and amusing, and while concerns were growing about queer men in general, there still existed the possibility of transvestism occurring without queer content. After the Famous 41, however, things changed dramatically. While the press, particularly outlets like the sensational *El Popular*, reveled in the details of the event and likely manufactured their own to keep the story going for weeks, they also began a process that marked the man-in-drag as antithetical to Mexican identity and as emblematic of the queer type. The process begun earlier in the nineteenth century—that of the gradual association of sodomy with male effeminacy, decadence, and poor leadership—had reached its conclusion: the collapsing of the sodomite and

the effeminate male together into the *afeminado* type and the “famous *jotitos*” present at the party on La Paz street. Over the next two decades, reports of queer men arrested invariably drew comparisons with the Famous 41 event, both in the capital and beyond.

Dangers in the Capital: the Price of Being Queer and Queer Resistance

Because *afeminados* were linked with scandal, sexual depravity, and the excesses of Porfirian society, for those that ventured into the street, especially those in drag, there were very real dangers. At 8 pm on Saturday, April 26, 1902, a man responding to the name of “Berta” and “attired with delicate women’s garments” caused a “scandal” as he quietly walked along the streets of the slaughterhouse (Rastro) district of Peralvillo.²⁶ Berta, who’s given name was Alberto Ortega, was dressed in lacey jacket (*saco de blondas grandes*), a very short skirt (*enagua de seda, muy corta*), rose-colored silk stockings (*media de seda color de rosa*), and pointed shoes (*choclos de aguzada punta*) with black bows (*moñoes negros*) and tied with golden buckles (*hebillas doradas*). He also wore a coat, bundled around him, but short enough so that his delicate clothing could be seen. “Three colored flowers in his curly wig completed his *toilette*,” reported *El País*. People began to gather to gawk at him as he walked. Upon nearing the city’s main slaughterhouse, he encountered a group of butchers. These men whistled at him, insulted him, and then beat him. The crowd closed in around the butchers as they pummeled him; when police finally intervened, they “found themselves in a serious predicament when trying to advance through the crowd” surrounding Ortega. Finally they pulled him out, taking him to the

²⁶ The district was located north east of the Zócalo and north of Tepito neighborhood, towards the northern edge of the city, between the Rio Consulado and Canal del Norte. For histories of the slaughterhouses and meatpacking in Mexico City, see Jeffrey M Pilcher, *The Sausage Rebellion: Public Health, Private Enterprise, and Meat in Mexico City, 1890-1917* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006). For essays on meatpacking and modernity, see Paula Young Lee, *Meat, Modernity, and the Rise of the Slaughterhouse*, 1st ed. (Durham, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2008).

police station, where he was “ordered to remove his feminine garments” and was isolated in a cell. The police then charged him with *ultrajes a la moral pública*.²⁷

As the story showed, *afeminados* faced dangers including encounters with hostile individuals or groups who took it upon themselves to dispense a version of vigilante justice. Adding insult to literal injuries, *afeminados* could then be arrested, charged with a crime, and imprisoned or exiled to a far-flung area of the republic.²⁸ Tellingly, the men who beat Berta were not similarly arrested by the police, at least as far as the article indicated, even though assault was a crime frequently prosecuted in court; neither did the article condemn the actions of the men involved nor the crowd who stood by as it occurred and lent no aid.²⁹ The “crime” was Berta’s for acting against the sex/gendered norm, and by implication, he deserved what he received from the crowd and from the police. Indeed, the incident showed how one aim was to essentially take his identity from him, first through the assault, then as Berta was forced, in another injurious insult, to remove his clothing and was isolated at the precinct.

Berta’s story is a grotesquely surreal one, as the men who supplied the city’s meat through the daily butchering of livestock were the very same who turned upon him, bloodying him in front of the slaughterhouse. For these men, who worked in a gory, smelly job, Berta’s delicate, refined, and sophisticated self-presentation may have triggered class anger as well, directed at him as a proxy for their work concerns and angst about their social status within the modernizing capital. Such men may have also been stoked by the homophobic discourses found

²⁷ “Los hombres nefandos,” *El País*, April 28, 1902, 1. The paper was a Catholic daily, and the headline, by using “*nefando*” directly linked Berta’s incident to both the Famous 41 and the legacy of the “*pecado nefando*”.

²⁸ On prisons and such exile, see Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

²⁹ This, then, is akin to the “homosexual panic” defense, in which the victim, by his nature, was the cause of the crime, not the assailants.

in the penny press that were directed at bourgeois excess and that openly criticized *afeminados*.³⁰ These men may have acted upon the discourses in their own way, choosing physical action over discursive satire as a means to claim masculine and honor in a time in which uneven modernization threatened the solidity of social status and traditional norms.

Nevertheless, Berta's very presence in public wearing fine women's clothing was an act of defiance, both against sex/gender norms and the repression that befell him and other men. After all, his beating and arrest occurred just a few months after the very public Famous 41 scandal—and a few weeks after a “reprise” of the event.³¹ Because of these events and how they were portrayed in the press, the image of the homosexual as an effeminate man had been emblazoned into the city's consciousness; people across class lines could all agree an *afeminado* was deviant and against the nation. Nevertheless, in commenting on his story, *El País* observed “There are still perverted and degenerate emulators that dare perform irritating scenes;” Berta was one such emulator, and beauty can be seen in his simple act of defiance as he, in the words of the newspaper “quietly walked down the street, making a show of cynical immorality” against the backdrop of the slaughterhouses that April night in 1902.³² In fact, the assault can be read as the other working-class men *misreading* Berta's performance, as the latter was mimicking the high-society transvestism that had become so famous. By doing so, he showed his own aspirations to a higher class, and their repression of him was, in a way, a thwarting of the class advancement of one of their peers, even if they did not acknowledge him as such.

³⁰See Rob Buffington, “Homophobia and the Mexican Working Class, 1900-1910,” in *The Famous 41: Sexuality and Social Control in Mexico, 1901*, ed. Robert McKee Irwin, Edward J. McCaughan, and Michelle Rocio Nasser (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 212.

³¹ “Otro baile igual al de los 41,” *El Popular*, February 5, 1902, 1.

³² “Los hombres nefandos,” 1.

Berta was not alone, and “reprises” of transvestism and queer personas in public would continue in the following decades, as would the drag balls.³³ But Berta’s act was particularly significant, given the city’s post-41 climate. His quiet walk, even though it was brutally repressed, nonetheless belied later observations that queer Mexicans lacked either the self-awareness or social development to resist a homophobic society. Or that they lacked “politics”—defined broadly as a recognition that who they were and wanted to present themselves as was counter-normative but still worthy of respect and part of the city’s social fabric—in their actions that only later generations, starting in the 1970s, would express. It is true that that Berta’s walk ended poorly for him, but that he was brave enough to attempt it should be remembered and seen as an early political moment on a larger, painful trajectory towards greater acceptance, an early salvo in a long conflict over human rights and citizenship.

Other *afeminados* recognized the political stakes in their identities and were willing to defend themselves legally. In May 1912, Miguel Torres and Joaquín Guitérrez were apprehended by police and consigned to Belén prison on the basis that they were men of “equivocal comportment” and had committed “moral faults”. According to *El Diario*, in the prison, they were given “comfortable accommodations.”³⁴ However, neither Torres nor Guitérrez accepted their imprisonment, and they sent an *escrito de amparo* to the judge protesting their situation. *Recurso de amparo* was (and remains) a Mexican legal action through which an individual’s personal and constitutional rights could be protected, including from state abuses.³⁵ *Amparo de libertad*, one form of the action essentially equivalent to habeas corpus, required that the custody

³³ Historian Moisés González Navarro notes that such men were prevalent along Plateros Street (later Avenida Madero). See Chapter 4, as well as Moisés González Navarro, *Historia moderna de México, vol. IV, La vida social* (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Hermes, 1957).

³⁴ Given Belén’s sordid and brutal reputation, it is unlikely that their accommodations were that “comfortable”.

³⁵ *Amparo* originated in Mexico in the first decades after independence and would be disseminated throughout Latin America and even to the Philippines. Other forms of *amparo* allowed gave judges powers of judicial review over laws or the constitutionality of other judicial decisions, actions conducted by administrations, and over peasants’ rights. All were part of an effort to protect both the individual and the constitution from abuses.

of prisoners be demonstrated, and without such legal custody, a prisoner be released. The two men's writ "alleged that being *afeminados* was not a crime defined and punished by the [Penal] Code"; in other words, they rejected the legal grounds—the so-called moral faults—on which they were detained. In addition, they asked to be protected from the judge that had wrongly sentenced them and to have their case reviewed by other judicial authorities, knowing that if their challenge were successful, they would regain their freedom.³⁶

In a strictly legal sense, the two men were correct: being an *afeminado* was not explicitly defined in the legal code as a crime, nor was the queer sexuality often associated with "equivocal comportment", as practicing sodomy and being a sodomite had been previously. Nevertheless, men were still prosecuted for being an *afeminado* on the grounds that they had committed "moral faults" that, whether occurring in public or not, were deemed by the arresting officers and judicial authorities as of interest to the public. A man appearing in drag at a party or in public was thus a prime target, and prosecutions would continue under various subjective guises.³⁷

Torres and Guitérrez, or perhaps an unnamed lawyer working on their behalf, recognized this subjectivity in the writ of *amparo*. What became of the men is not described in *El Diario*, but at the very least, the challenge was to be heard by another judge. Whether or not the challenge was successful, it remains remarkable as an early example of how queer men asserted their constitutional rights vis-à-vis a judicial system—as abetted by the police and press—that sought to remove rights. Later men would also challenge the legality of their arrests, asserting their right to freely be themselves.³⁸

³⁶ "Piden amparo porque creen no delinquieron," *Diario*, May 17, 1912.

³⁷ On the arbitrary roundups of men, see chapters 2 and 3. Ultimately, the thin veneer of legality would be removed from such police roundups targeting "moral faults" and such roundups would continue unofficially as a form of harassment.

³⁸ See Chapter 7.

Icons, Identities, and Personas: The Two Pavlovas

As the previous examples showed, men continued to use transvestism as an important part of queer socialization. Another method of self-expression was the adoption of feminine personas—complete with appropriate fashion styles, nicknames, and mannerisms. Many of the personas that men adopted were based on famous women of the day: starlets from the emerging film industry, famous dancers or actresses, and even international stars. For example, on February 17, 1919, police raided an *accesoria* in which they discovered a “veritable witch’s Sabbath of *afeminados*” that included drinks and much revelry.³⁹ Reported *Excelsior*,

To the sound, surely from some street band, the degenerate subjects gave themselves over to the pleasures of Terpsicore,⁴⁰ sweetly intertwined, taking indistinctly the man’s role and the women’s role, as the opportunity presented itself.⁴¹

The partygoers were discovered dancing at the *accesoria* owned by Juan Pablo García (El Pavlowa), located at number 25, Callejón de San Camilito, a street heading north from Garibaldi Plaza. Within only a few years, this area became prominent for its Mariachi music, the *jaliciense* foods like *birria* offered at the San Camilito food market, and the infamous El Tenampa cantina/cabaret, which was frequented by Mexicans of all social statuses, homosexuals, and tourists.⁴² Their party foreshadowed the popularity of the area for nightlife and the bending of social and sexual norms that would feature there.

What drew police to the site was as much the noisy dispute between Antonio Aguilar, “El Magnollo”, and Narcizo “Nichona”, as it was the gay revelry. Aguilar and Narcizo were *rijosos*,

³⁹ An *accesoria* was a type of small store or store-like space, common in Mexico City along commercial streets. The term used was *aquellarre*.

⁴⁰ Mythological muse of dancing and choruses. The term would be used again by *Excelsior* in 1921 to describe the scene of a “reprise” of the Famous 41.

⁴¹ “Una buena requisita de afeminados hizo la policía,” *Excelsior*, February 17, 1919, 1. In its description, *Excelsior* in vain tried to reestablish the sex/gender norms and bifurcate behaviors into those associated with men and those with women. In other words: to discipline queer men who transgressed these lines.

⁴² *Jaliciense* is a demonym of Jalisco, a state in western Mexico in which is located Guadalajara, and origin of mariachi bands and tequila for which Mexico—and Garibaldi Plaza—would become famous. *Birria* is a delicious spicy meat stew from Jalisco, usually made with pork, goat, lamb, or mutton.

i.e., lascivious and prone to fights, claimed *Excelsior*, fighting over another man named Gilberto. El Pavlowa, who although not present during the fight was apprehended and questioned by the police, confirmed that the jealousy over fair Gilberto had been ongoing since 1911. Matters boiled over during the dance party, with the *alhajas* (“jewels”) coming to blows, resulting in Aguilar receiving a serious head injury.⁴³ Four men—Pedro Escobar “Lucerito”, Fernando Tello “La Argentina”, Guillermo Castillo “El Tórtola”, and Aguilar—were taken into custody. Police arrested five more—who had been waiting in front of the building in a car—upon returning to the *accesoria*, claiming they were “suspicious individuals” of the “same defect”.⁴⁴

With its characteristic flair, *Excelsior* ridiculed the *afeminados* with pejorative descriptions. For example, the term *desahogados* marked the men as potentially both well-to-do and brazenly immoral. Its use thus signaled the presence of wealthier revelers, as well as other “immoral” participants from the lower classes that were worth ridicule for trying to emulate the depraved decadence of their social betters. By using the term, as well as other derogatory language such as *alhajas*, *rijosos*, and *de su calaña* (“of their type”) *Excelsior* designated the social grounds through which its readers—particularly from the middle and working-classes—could criticize the *afeminados*, by invoking perceived moral decay and dysfunction found in the upper and lower classes. The *afeminados*, after all, had been involved in an immoral, even pagan ritual—as evidenced by referencing both the witches and Terpsicore. They were also degenerates—thus linking them to criminals in the discourses of the day—which was a consequence of their social failings, again whether elite or of the lower class. *Excelsior* thus described the event in ways that would have evoked the legacy of the Famous 41 for its readers,

⁴³ The use of *alhajas* was meant to criticize the men.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1, 5. *Coche* is the term used; given the time period, it may have meant either a automobile or a carriage.

highlighting the gender transgressions of the party-goers: their feminine nicknames, their elaborate dance choreographies, their same-sex revelry, and their dressing in drag or as a dandy.

The article also provided information about the party-goers and the sort of lifestyles, cultural tastes, and communities that existed at that time. A variety of men attended the party; One was dressed handsomely in black, with a silk scarf around his neck. He had a pink or rosy skin tone (*sonrosado*) and carefully trimmed beard and hair. Inside his jacket were two puffs for his face powder, which during a moment when he “thought none was watching him” he took “one out to give himself a touch up, as the vainest ballerina would have done it.”⁴⁵

In contrast, Aguilar—el Magnollo—was singled-out for his racial heritage and his perceived failure at distilling even a perverted form of effeminacy like the man in black. While *Excelsior* reported that he should have had some “special feature that makes him look like this beautiful flower”, all that observers could see in him was a “frail and ungraceful Indian” who spoke “with a sickly sweet tone”⁴⁶ in the voice of a *vieja aguardientosa*, i.e., a drunken old lady.⁴⁷ The term thus reinforced El Magnollo’s association with lower-class vulgarity and racial marginality, as well as his gender deviance and failed effeminacy. For *Excelsior*, El Magnollo was not—nor could be—a beautiful ballerina like his counterparts, such as the pink-skinned man in black. He was instead a graceless, gravely-voiced old woman who spoke poorly due to his racial heritage. If anything, El Magnollo had failed: as a man, as a “woman”, and as a racial other who, by his very hereditary heritage, was a degenerate.

El Magnollo’s story is one of the few that explicitly highlights issues of race, and, when taken together with the man-in-black, vividly showcases how “respectable” society—as

⁴⁵ Of course, he may have been playing to his audience, despite what *Excelsior* thought; nevertheless, how they described him bordered on approval.

⁴⁶ The word used here, *dulzón*, implies also a “schmaltzy” or “slushy” way of talking.

⁴⁷ The term *aguardientosa* was derived from *aguardiente*, a strong, cheap alcohol common among poor alcoholics that irritated the throat, leaving a distinctive hoarse voice.

represented by *Excelsior*—viewed queer men: i.e., as either decadent, effeminate elites or as failed poor men or Indians whose social and hereditary origins and alcoholism tied them to criminality and sexual degeneracy and whose inability to properly “imitate” women, like wealthy did, made them even more grotesque. Both were *desahogados*, whether as immoral elites or vulgar degenerates. In other words, elites, by being effeminate, were emblems of a false, decadent, and depraved modernity—rather than the modern nation-building they claimed to represent—while the poor threatened the nation with their own degeneracy. Their description was another way that *Excelsior* staked out the consequences of the “sexual problem”, as well as the parameters of normalcy—sexual, social, and racial—for its middle-class, *mestizo* readers.⁴⁸

Yet, this story can tell us more than the discursive means through which *Excelsior* sought to carve out a Mexican identity for certain elements of the middle and working-classes. For example, El Magnollo’s presence at the party demonstrates how queer identities were present in diverse strata within Mexican society and that such identities were not simply limited to the upper echelons. Moreover, men of different personas co-mingled in party situations that were different from the elite parties described earlier.

The article also showcased, unintentionally, the importance of entertainment idols, personal nicknames, and choreographed personas to Mexican *afeminados* before the 1920s, thereby offering an important glimpse into queer identities and communities at that time. For example, *afeminados* wore their nicknames “with pride”, even while being ridiculed by policemen. *Excelsior* mocked such pride, but that it existed at all—and remained, despite sanction—helps illuminate the importance of fashioning queer personas among *afeminados*. By

⁴⁸ El Magnollo was proof of the need for social engineering among the poor, while the man in black demonstrated the dangerous vanity and effeminacy of the elite. Of course, while many of the lower-classes had Native American origins, such origins cannot be unilaterally assumed for all lower-class *afeminados* without more descriptions, and such information is not always extant.

taking a nickname and choreographing a persona—through verbal transvestism, performance, fashion, movement, and speech—an *afeminado* entered into a community of like-minded individuals for whom the name and persona would have had multiple symbolic valences and meanings. That is, he marked himself as *part* of a community of individuals who would recognize his similarity. This was a shift from adopting cross-dressing as a carnivalesque form, appropriate only in certain situations to cross-dressing as a marker of personal identity and community belonging; this shift would gain steam in the years after the Famous 41.

In fact, it is reasonable to assert that the *afeminados* rounded up by police in February 1919 were aware of the implications of their actions. As I noted in the introduction, myths about Mexican homosexuality have suggested that queer men were unaware of others like them and internalized dominant homophobic narratives, rather than fashioning their own queer identities, until the 1970s. However, the stories presented here thus far show that rather than lacking sufficient social development to understand themselves as individuals or part of a group based in some part on sexuality, they instead expressed themselves with pride. Such pride is an important corrective to the silences surrounding queer identities prior to the later decades of the twentieth century, as well as Whiggish teleologies that overemphasize the importance of later groups—from the Contemporáneos to the homosexual liberation movement—at the expense of a richer historical legacy. It is hard to believe that these men were merely “performing” an identity or camp without such a performance influencing or in part shaping a sense of self or community, even if the resistance that the individuals or community could levy was limited by later standards of political organization. Nicknames and their attendant personas had symbolic meaning among *afeminados*; otherwise, why would they have exhibited pride, particularly when such pride would earn them harsher treatment?

For his part, El Pavlowa took his nickname from Anna Pavlova (1881-1931), the internationally renowned Russian ballerina who toured the world with her dancing troupe in the first third of the twentieth century.⁴⁹ As in other nations, Pavlova was a celebrity among Mexicans; as early as 1913, when Pavlova left Russia on her way to London and New York, newspaper *El Imparcial* assured readers that Mexico would be included in her world tour.⁵⁰ Four years later in September 1917, the film “La Muda de Portici”—which showcased her dancing prowess and was produced by Universal—began showing at the Trianon Palace, located at República de Perú 75, a few blocks north of the Zócalo. Shows cost one peso in the orchestra seats and thirty centavos for gallery seats;⁵¹ three shows ran daily at 4 pm, 7:15 pm, and 9:30 pm on September 23, 25, 27, and 29.⁵² In October, *La Revista de Yucatán* advertised “La Muda de Portici” in Mérida, the capital of Yucatan state.⁵³ It played at both the Teatro “Independencia” and Teatro Peon Contreras.⁵⁴

Then on December 19, 1918, *Excelsior* announced that Pavlova would finally be appearing in Mexico in January 1919.⁵⁵ She did so on Saturday, January 25, 1918 in a program containing scenes including “the Fairy Doll” and “Walpurgis Night.”⁵⁶ The following day, *Excelsior* announced that after seeing Pavlova, viewers “forgot all other ballerinas.”⁵⁷ Performances would continue in subsequent weeks, earning further praise.

⁴⁹ By unpacking the context of the nickname and Pavlova’s own history in Mexico, we can see the importance of entertainment and transnational culture in the shaping of Mexican queer identities.

⁵⁰ “La bailarina Rusa Pavlowa vendrá a México,” *El Imparcial*, October 6, 1913, 2.

⁵¹ “‘La Muda de Portici,’” *Excelsior*, September 13, 1917, 5. One of the first ads was on September 7, boasting 8 rolls to the film. Ads would continue to run in *Excelsior* from September 15-22, 1917.

⁵² “Espectáculos para hoy,” *Excelsior*, September 22, 1917, 5.

⁵³ “Teatro principal,” *La Revista de Yucatán*, October 11, 1918, 2.

⁵⁴ “Teatro-‘Independencia,’” *La Revista de Yucatán*, October 22, 1918, 3.

⁵⁵ See: “Ana Pavlowa, la célèbre bailarina rusa que hará una temporada en México,” *Excelsior*, December 19, 1918; ads appearing in *Excelsior* from December 28, 1918 through January 1919.

⁵⁶ “Teatro Arbeu: Anna Pavlowa,” *Excelsior*, January 24, 1919, 7. “Walpurgis Night” refers to a traditional spring festival of dancing and bonfires in Central and Northern Europe, i.e., a “witches’ sabbath”.

⁵⁷ Hipolito Seijas, “Después de ver bailar a la Pavlowa, se olvidan todas las bailarinas,” *Excelsior*, January 26, 1919, 3.

It is impossible to know if El Pavlowa (or his friends) attended the live performances or movie screenings that show-cased Pavlova's dancing. It can be assumed, however, that some queer men did and that for these men, the performances inspired their own artistic impulses. Salvador Novo was fifteen during Pavlova's tour, and he attended at least one performance of her troupe. In the theater, he was noticed by a representative of the group who suggested that he would make a good dancer, being of the right age to start. Novo enthusiastically agreed to meet with the man later at his room in the Hotel Iturbide—located along the cruisy and very queer Avenida Madero—to discuss the matter. There the man gradually lured him into an “act as ridiculous as it was harmless: that I would forcefully bite him on his right nipple.” That was the extent of the man's interest, reported Novo, and he never heard from him again.⁵⁸ Whether or not similar experiences occurred between other members of Mexico's queer community and the troupe—and it is likely that they did if others were staying in the same hotel—Pavlova's influence on the queer community was obvious. The men in El Pavlowa's *acesoria* danced and choreographed their evening, most likely, on the basis of what they had seen.

Pavlova was one of the early female stars emulated and adored by members of Mexican queer social circles of all classes; she also was one of the early sources for queer nicknames. Other women, such as Mimí Derba and Maria Conesa, during the early 1900s, and Maria Félix, during the golden age of Mexican Cinema (1940-1970s) served as similar role-models. What set Pavlova apart from these women was that she was an international star, while the others were either Mexican-born or naturalized stars whose fame was more limited, if still grand. After Pavlova, Hollywood starlets would become models for Mexican *afeminados*, such as Greta

⁵⁸ Novo, *La estatua de sal*, 104.

Garbo.⁵⁹ Such emulation and adoration continued throughout the twentieth century, although by the 1960s, some drag queens, such as the famous Xochitl, began to look towards indigenous culture for inspiration as well, rather than solely to transnational cultures.⁶⁰

Perhaps taking such a name implied that El Pavlowa either believed himself—or was believed by others—to be as beautiful and talented at dancing as the real Pavlova. (Or perhaps that he was so ungraceful that the name was meant as ironic.) In either case, the choosing of the name, and its reporting in *Excelsior*, speaks to the richness of the social life that pre-1920 *afeminados* enjoyed in Mexico City. Such *afeminados* adored Pavlova as an icon; the man dressed in black dotting his face with a powder puff may have indeed felt himself to be a ballerina only a short time before, when he had been dancing with another man in the elaborate choreographies of the party. *Excelsior*'s mocking of him as a vain ballerina in that case would have been an unintended compliment, and it points to the success he had in performing his persona. Likewise, the mocking of the party-goers as *mamarrachos*—i.e., extravagantly dressed, vulgar, clown-like individuals—also demonstrates the success that the men had in articulating personas, because *Excelsior*'s response was to try and dismiss their efforts as ridiculous.

Once the men arrived at the police station, their shaking and hip wiggling, gestures and “flapping,” caused hilarity among the police (and later among some of the readers of *Excelsior*), but they were also demonstrations of survival. Like the nicknames and personas, these gestures would have been intelligible by others in the *ambiente* as meaningful, rather than as worthy of derision. Moreover, we cannot discount the effect that reading about the parties would have on a prospective queer. While they might take caution, given the detailed exercise of police and press

⁵⁹ See for example “Afeminados presos ayer en la Alameda,” *El Nacional*, October 13, 1932, sec. 1. In this sense, transvestism remained a foreign-influenced practice.

⁶⁰ For Xochitl's perspectives on homosexual liberation through drag, see Gustavo Xochilteotzin, Juan Jacobo Hernandez, and Rafael Manrique, “Testimonio: Gustavo Xochilteotzin--XÓCHITL,” January 8, 1984, CIDHOM CD.

power, they nevertheless gained details on where people like them congregated, how they dressed and spoke, how they fashioned personas, and what they did when together.

As I argued in my earlier discussion of the myths associated with Mexican homosexuality, there have been arguments stating that no true “gay” identities existed prior to the 1920 and the emergence of the Contemporáneos, and that such identities were relatively small in number until after homosexual liberation movements in the 1970s. In effect, gay identity was read as requiring a militant character related to sexual liberation, which itself was a response to the repression of the post-World War II era. In effect, this was the same argument made about the United States before *Gay New York* shattered the myth and called into question the assumed trajectories and development of gay identities.

In the Mexican context, the story of El Pavlowa serves a similar function. Like the fairies and other gays that Chauncey illuminated in New York, Mexican *afeminados* formed their own forms of identities and community, which until this research, have largely been forgotten. Moreover, these identities did not always conform to the pattern that scholars including Monsiváis have articulated—namely, that the first “gay” identities were found among the middle and upper-class poets, writers, and artists in the *ambiente* who fashioned themselves after Wilde, Gide, or Rimbaud. These men were indeed important, but they were also just the most *visible* and most remembered form of queer identity being expressed. As El Pavlowa and his friends show, queer identities were not limited to the Contemporáneos’ dandified model.

Instead, he and his *afeminado* friends show that “gay” identities included forms of transgressive sex/gender performances, personas, and personal choreographies. The persistence of drag parties despite the legacy of 1901, points to social complexity and community among the *afeminados* which, in a climate of hostility, should be read as in part a form of resistance, as well

as a form of identity-formation and pleasure-seeking. Moreover, such parties show more complex connections between men that went beyond fleeting encounters in cruising areas or serendipitous encounters between cross-dressing men.

Two weeks after the initial raid in early March 1919, police again apprehended El Pavlowa and two other *afeminados*—Roberto Quevedo (El Forcito) and Rodrigo Mendoza—in a house along San Camilito alley. The men were creating a scandal and “committing truly immoral and degenerate acts” at seven in the evening. Upon being taken to the police station, El Pavlowa and El Forcito admitted to their “degeneration and abysmal instincts, but not before making a dramatic scene of their immorality.”⁶¹ Mendoza, in contrast, showed restraint and stated he had been “casually” passing by the door of the house where the scandalizing was taking place, precisely when police conducted the apprehension. Whether it was true or not, it was clear that El Pavlowa was back to his old tricks, and the previous encounter with the police had not dissuaded him from his identity, nor his willingness to appear as an *afeminado* in public.

On Multiple Identities and Transvestism

The examples presented above have interwoven stories of Mexican transvestism by men of various classes and social statuses in different situations. I have argued that for the Mexican men appearing at parties or in public in women’s attire—particularly those instances after the 1901—transvestism was an act that asserted personal identity, community membership, and a politics of resistance, and these were already under construction in the late nineteenth century. Yet, a concern in viewing expressions of transvestism in this manner exists: that doing so reduces the complexity of a queer individual or his community interactions to one aspect, however important. For some men, drag was the primary way in which they expressed queerness. For

⁶¹ “Tres afeminados cayeron ayer en poder de las autoridades,” *El Pueblo*, March 2, 1919, 2.

others, it was only one way to do so; in this later case, then, the “essential” identity being expressed was that of being queer. Cultivating a persona that mirrored feminine norms did not preclude also cultivating one that was itself also queer but not predicated on the assumption of strictly feminine dress, mannerisms, or affectations. Antonio Adalid mentioned above, for example, was known to take excursions as a dandy to the watery canals at Xochimilco, south of Mexico City; he and his friends wore Panama hats and blue blazers during one such event, and this sort of fashion was all the rage among dandies at the time.⁶² In addition, not all queer men would accept transvestites or other effeminate men as openly as those at the balls and parties. Indeed, as later sections will show, some queer men internalized homophobia to a degree that they rejected the more effeminate *afeminados* as unworthy of even friendships, let alone sex or relationships, while asserting their own identity and status.⁶³

Does the ability to deploy various forms of queer personas undermine the assertion that men who deployed such personas understood themselves as part of a community and as possessing a shared form of identity? Not at all—it means that these men were not limited by one queer performance but were a composite of many, with some being individually more important than others and that these performances emanated from a more central understanding of their place within Mexican society as an “other” on the basis of their emotional and physical attraction for men, their interest in breaking down barriers between gender, and the rejection of both their same-sex interest and gender transgressions by “normal” Mexicans. Fault lines between various subgroups among queer men, then, did not mean that they did not recognize something common between them: men who were very effeminate and dressed in drag socialized with men who did

⁶² Novo, *La estatua de sal*, 109.

⁶³ Salvador Novo, for example, defined himself at once as queer and anti-masculine, while also defining himself *against* the cross-dressing queens with whom he was often lumped in journalistic criticism. Elias Nandino, another writer and medical doctor, likewise rejected Novo as too effeminate, labeling him as one of the *afeminados* that Nandino would not ever sleep with, since he preferred “real men”.

not; all slept with other men, sought emotional connections with other men, and were targets of societal reproach. Community and identity building do not require uniformity of thought; instead, they are sustained through similar experiences; mutually shared fears of repression and the experiences of disempowerment that queer men faced, as well as methods to resist them, were important threads that linked men together. As later sections will show, cross-group alliances would form that would incorporate many queer types together.

Beyond Carnival—The Politics of Posing and Transvestism

In the act of assuming a persona, the queer men described above enacted a “politics of posing”. Such personas were one aspect of life that queer men could control in large part themselves; they determined who they sought to emulate, what icons of feminine beauty or talent to aspire to, and what moments to deploy their personas. Theirs was a “strategy of provocation”, a strategic use of excess and exaggeration to challenge not only societal norms, but a gauntlet thrown to force non-queers to gaze back, to *see* them, and to participate in the reinforcement of making the queer visible, even if such recognition came at a price.⁶⁴ In Sylvia Molloy’s words,

Posing makes evident the elusiveness of all constructions of identity, their fundamentally performative nature. It increasingly problematizes gender, its formulation, and its divisions: it subverts categories, questions reproductive models, proposes new modes of identification based on recognition of desire more than on cultural pacts, and offers (and plays at) new sexual identities. It also resorts to an exploitation of the public, in the form of self-advertisement and very visible self-fashioning, that appears to make the spectator very nervous about what goes on in private.

After the “birth” of modern Mexican homosexuality in 1901, this nervousness about what went on in private would be heightened, with assumptions made that such goings on were indeed sexually queer; any party could involve transvestism among homosexuals. Thus, “normal” Mexicans needed the private to be *made* public so that they could participate in the queer

⁶⁴ Sylvia Molloy, “The Politics of Posing,” in *Hispanisms and Homosexualities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 143.

exploitation of the public by gazing at the queer other and reveling in his sordidness, so as to mark him as aberrant and to affirm their own normalcy. Doing so would, it was assumed, beat the posing *afeminado* at his own game by collapsing the public and private together so that, under the guise of legality and social reform, he could be denounced, disciplined, and dismissed. In other words, non-queers wanted to control the spectacle and by doing so, hoped to reframe queer resistance, identity, and community as merely bad imitation and deviance.

And yet, through this attempt, “normal” Mexicans were also participating in the queer male’s game of posing, acknowledging his visibility, even if the result was violence, a police roundup, or repression. In this way, the very politics of transvestism and queer posing undermined attempts to control it: posing was transgressive, a form of behavior that took the Carnival out of its normal limits and inserted it into the social fabric of the culture. And once transvestism was rejected as anti-Mexican—because it reflected a modernity and “masculinity” that was rejected as degraded, dangerous, and depraved—it became an important survival strategy for men resisting repression, who in turn claimed that such queer behavior was not, in fact, against Mexicanidad.⁶⁵ In either case, following 1901, transvestism and more broadly homosexuality were intertwined with Mexican identity, nation, and modernity, if primarily through negation.

II. Imaging the Masculine Nation

⁶⁵ Fears of transvestism would also continue; a common one was that the queer man would be so good that he would dupe a unsuspecting “real man”, much like the German attaché had with Porfirio Diaz. At least two 1930s Don Chepe and Mr. Puff cartoons depicted the title characters being “duped” by beautiful men in drag, and periodicals worried visible, cross-dressing queer men would threaten the tourist industry. Nevertheless, displays of transvestism would continue throughout the century; *afeminados* in drag would be sent to the Islas Mariás penal colony in the 1930s, and drag balls would continue, such as one in 1951 in which the “unhappy” homosexuals pictured in the tabloid *Alarma!* looked anything but unhappy. Drag would also become a source of strength for some men to challenge the system, such as the famous queen Xochitl, who held drag balls on Mexico’s independence day in the 1960s as a form of queering the nation’s birthday. And *travestis* would be among the most visible members of the homosexual liberation movement in the 1970s, turning their politics of posing into militant activism.

If transvestism was a key example of the decadence, depravity, and failings of the Porfirian regime, many in the Mexican public sphere had an alternative in mind: a masculine nation. Instead of the “weakness” perceived in *afeminados* and others afflicted with “effeminacy” and potential homosexuality, commentators asserted that Mexico needed to ensure its citizens and future citizens would be virile.⁶⁶ Both before and during the Revolution, these critics argued for a different modernity than produced by the Porfiriato; weakness and effeminacy, which were regarded as products of Porfirian excesses, had to be discarded, as did traits like laziness and unproductivity. An example: in May 1908, *La Opinion* reported on two men remitted to the police for “having no trade or benefit.” Neither were nameless vagrants; instead, they were *señoritos* from the high society who spent their time aimlessly in arcades and brothels, bringing shame, asserted the newspaper, to those who knew them. Rejecting these *flaneurs*, *La Opinion* asserted that it was “time to cut away this damaging evil that immortalizes societies.” Such men, instead of being robust and manly citizen sons” and “helpful to the nation in critical moments” were instead “campy, sympathetic to softness, effeminate and sickly, mannequins of circumstances and unworthy of calling themselves men.”⁶⁷

Even though the men were, presumably, heterosexuals, their orientation was not sufficient for rendering them as legitimate citizens, because citizenship was defined as something that required “masculine” action, not indolence. Dandies, like cross-dressing homosexuals, did not qualify, even if they were straight, and “The number of effeminate individuals that transit through the streets causes true disgust,” reported *Heraldo de Morelos* in February 1909. Such

⁶⁶ Men in other sectors also articulated the difference between being weak and being a man in relation to homosexuals. When Gil Delgado was injured in August 1904, he refused to tell authorities who had stabbed him, stating that doing so was something that *maricones* did, rather than men, who kept silent about such matters. See “El silencio de los hombres,” *El Imparcial*, August 27, 1904.

⁶⁷ “Sin oficio,” *La Opinion*, May 9, 1908, 3.

individuals “know nothing of virility nor the manliness that should regulate all the acts of the masculine sex, which they dishonor.”⁶⁸

From the unnamed commentator’s perspective, his generation was degenerating. This degeneration could be seen both in the “abnormals and degenerates” who met for dances and to go out on the town while trying “to change or disguise their sex”—a clear reference to the Famous 41—and in the dandies who dressed with “exquisiteness” and details appropriate for women, rather than the “strong sex.” Such men—the *pollos high life*—went to markets and stores to buy “little hats” and “things of beauty,” dressing flamboyantly in white suits and shoes as they walked along Plateros street (later Madero Avenue) the site of the High Life department store and other purveyors of sumptuous goods.⁶⁹ The commentator was reacting to the new visibility of the *ambiente* in the period. Mexican historian Moisés González Navarro described a “zoological scale”⁷⁰ of the dandy types “lion (león), dandy, *catrín*,⁷¹ lizard (*lagartijo*), snake (*serpentino*), *gomoso*⁷², and *sucré*.⁷³” These men were characterized by their flashy, colorful, modern style and conspicuous consumption, as well as their efforts to show off their fashion, flirt

⁶⁸ “Nuestra generación degenera,” *Heraldo de Morelos*, February 28, 1909, 2-3.

⁶⁹ Avenida Madero was a primary street for shopping and commerce for wealthier Mexicans. From the beginning, the dandy’s preference for fine goods marked him as distinct from his peers, and as in the case described by Cuéllar in his novel *Chucho el Ninfo*, such a preference raised questions about his gender and sexuality, particularly as alternative forms of masculinity were emerging in the Revolutionary period that eschewed the decadence of the Porfiriato and oriented themselves around national socio-political projects.

⁷⁰ While many of these men were interested in women, one cannot help but see a similarity with the “horticultural lads” described in the United States (i.e., pansies during the “pansy crazes” of the 1920s and 1930s; in the Mexico case, the men were “zoological” instead. See George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 15, 249, 315.; and chapter 6 of Chad Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

⁷¹ Translates as someone who was “well-dressed” or “adorned”. Stylish and flashy, in other words.

⁷² Literally “gummy” or “sticky”.

⁷³ Perhaps this is a reference to the use of boater/Panama hats, which were actually from Ecuador, as *sucré* is the type of money used in that country.

with women, and promenaded in the streets as part of the process of *florear*.⁷⁴ However, the modernity these men embraced was contested; as historian Victor Macías González described,

While some regarded the purchase and display of costly foreign and domestic clothing and other goods as indicative of the country's economic, social, and industrial progress vis-à-vis Western Europe, others saw in the dandy's shopping sprees a sinister feminization of the elite.⁷⁵

In other words, there were those who challenged the Porfirian version of modernity in large part because it fostered an environment in which male effeminacy, foreign culture, and consumption converged. The commentator in *Heraldo de Morelos* was one of the latter. His critique, then, implicated the upper echelons of Porfirian society, the dandies that participated in the transnational consumption cultures, and homosexuals as symptoms of the same effeminacy. None of these were “real men” and instead were men whose masculinity was in question. Indeed, their flashiness—with their preferences for fine clothing, sumptuous household items, and elegant personal hygiene products, which were advertised in periodicals and storefronts in the capital's most stylish boulevards—exacerbated their perceived effeminacy, and they became emblematic of moral decay.⁷⁶

In addition, the piece expressed an important discursive strain that would grow in importance in succeeding decades: the codification of gender roles into a strict binary, rather than into the more androgynous or liminal forms that modernity produced and made visible. An example: rather than placing the blame for effeminacy—expressed in *afeminados*'s campy behaviors and the dandies' attention to personal appearance—on a physical defect, the problem was education and the social environment in which it occurred. Waxing nostalgically on an

⁷⁴ González Navarro, *Historia modern de México*, vol. IV, 408.

⁷⁵ Victor Macías-González, “The Lagartijo at the High Life: Masculine Consumption, Race, Nation, and Homosexuality in Porfirian Mexico,” in *The Famous 41: Sexuality and Social Control in Mexico, 1901*, ed. Robert McKee Irwin, Edward J. McCaughan, and Michelle Rocio Nasser (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 227.

⁷⁶ This would seem to be one of the origins of the “ugly cult” of the 1920s and 1930s that said men should be virile but that beauty was something for women. See Chapter 5.

imagined, idyllic past—when men were men and taught boys to be men with manly voices and manly games like playing war and boxing—the article described how the preference for female teachers had disrupted boys learning how to become men. The social environment could degenerate male youths, as too much exposure to women’s high-pitched voices; women’s attention to personal appearance; and activities like playing with dolls undermined masculinity.

“Peoples deserve their fate,” proclaimed another column on “civic duty” in *Diario de Hogar* in March 1910, “because virile, proud, patriotic, selfless peoples sacrifice life and wealth to ennoble their homeland, in order to defend it against every internal or external danger, sparing no sacrifice.” In contrast, in “the weak and effeminate, cowards and ruinous, there is no stimulus that moves them; everything is indifferent and they leave it to be done by those who perch in power through intrigue or treason.”⁷⁷ Protest after scandal after outrage after humiliation would flow from such people. Democratic republicanism, however, could prevent such social traumas, and such government required patriotic participation from the right sort of men.

Similar ideas would continue to circulate during the Revolution itself, as challenges were raised against elite control of the country. *Churubusco* asserted in May 1914 that “Salvation is found in those from below, the those that do not belong to the ‘high society.’ It is in this heterogeneous and heroic mass that fills the workshops, the offices and stores...” not among the “effeminate ephebes” and “vagabond snobs” that passed by in their “London suits” or in their “formidable” automobiles (another sign of modernity).⁷⁸ Even suffragette and women’s rights activist Hermila Galindo weighed in April 1915, arguing that the true “vice” of Mexican society was in abandoning women to the kitchen, where superstition and religious dogma would infiltrate the hearts of youths; “so it is how generations of slaves and *afeminados* have formed,”

⁷⁷ “Deber cívico,” *Diario de Hogar*, March 9, 1910, 3.

⁷⁸ J. Rafael Rubio, “Coasa de ‘rejuvenecer’: Los niños dorados,” *Churubusco*, May 14, 1914, 2.

she asserted. An educated woman, however, could instead proclaim the truth and do “heroic deeds” and “combat injustice;” in other words, she could be the source of patriotic advancement, rather than the origin of effeminate, superstitious degeneration.⁷⁹ Male effeminacy, though, remained an undesirable quality in the citizenry.

Criticism of male effeminacy in the 1900s and 1910s was at times its most strident from the working-class penny press.⁸⁰ Caricatures appeared on the covers of publications like *El Diablito Bromista* and *El Cabezón* that showcased the dandy as associated with homosexuality. *El Cabezón* ran an image on September 9, 1917 of a *fifi* (another word for dandy) with the caption: “One of those fifis with cane and umbrella who carries his belly stuck to his bu...”.⁸¹ The implication was that the man was a homosexual, and he was portrayed with an oversized head, slender body, prominent buttocks, and giant shoes, the exaggeration of which referenced the importance of shoes to dandies as markers of status and their desire to show off, as well as their potential association with the Famous 41. If “salvation” was to be found from below, then it is ironic that *los de abajo* criticized not just elites, but also the middle-classes from which the other commentators above were writing. In this way, the working-classes made claims on masculine status and honor by linking the middle-classes, who were appropriating “the below” for their political aims, to the failed Porfirian policies. As historian Robert Buffington argued,

Taken as a whole, these frequent attacks on bourgeois manhood might have been diffuse, but, of all the homophobic strategies deployed in the Mexico City penny press, they were the most potentially damaging to the legitimacy of the Porfirian social order. If the bourgeoisie couldn’t produce and weren’t real men, how could they be expected to lead an unruly country like Mexico?

⁷⁹ Hermila Galindo, “¡Las mujeres a la cocina!,” *El Pueblo*, April 18, 1915, 2.

⁸⁰ Historian Robert Buffington has an excellent book chapter on the penny press and its criticism of elites and the middle-class, as well as its “homophobia.” See Buffington, “Homophobia and the Mexican Working Class.”

⁸¹ “*Un fifi de esos fifis que con bastón y paraguas y que llevan la barriga pegadita con las na...*”, the latter word started being *nalgas*, which is a slang term for buttocks. See *Ibid.*, 210-211, 213.

In other words, the penny press used many of the same rubrics of masculine citizenship against the social sector that sought to define the “new man” vis-à-vis Porfirian decadence. Asked a columnist in *El Diablito Rojo* to ask rhetorically in the April 16, 1908 edition “When will be civilized?” The answer: “When there are no more dandies throwing flowers.”⁸²

In each of these examples, despite of coming from a variety of sources and political origins, patriotism, the nation, the role of the citizen, heteronormativity and masculinity were juxtaposed against effeminacy. The way forward was through the bolstering of the family in order to produce the right sort of future citizens, and even someone like Galindo, who envisioned new roles for women in the post-revolutionary period, would uphold the “otherness” of male effeminacy.⁸³ This critique was also couched in nationalist terms, as the goods the men were consuming often originated in foreign countries; while through the consumption of goods— notably similar fashions—and ideas, homosexual men in diverse regions of the world were interconnected, this transnational interconnectivity was, because it did not originate in *los de abajo*, a serious threat. After all, the Porfirians had looked outward rather than to Mexico itself for inspiration on how to craft a Mexican nation, and dandies (including some who were

⁸² Ibid., 211. Yet, while working-class journalism may have criticized this conspicuous consumption and the men who indulged in it, working-class men also inhabited Avenida Madero (either working there or traveling it as part of their workday), taking part in the street’s queer culture by serving as the objects of desire for the middle-class and elite queer men, as well as frequently their lovers. A queer man’s appearance made him noticeable; for any man who could read the signs correctly and cast the right glance at an opportune moment, the rewards—monetary, sexual, and emotional—could be many. See the multiple examples in Novo, *La estatua de sal*. The criticism in the penny press would be echoed by artists like Diego Rivera and writers like Stridentist Germán Lizt Arzubide. What would be determined as masculine would develop through the century through the representations appearing in painting, film, and literature, as well as the philosophical musings of writers like Samuel Ramos and Octavio Paz; however, the dandy was often the foil of these presentations, even if what actually was considered as manly was difficult to define and middle-class sensibilities would develop that incorporated consumption in some forms later in the century.

⁸³ Olcott goes into more depth about Galindo’s role in the women’s rights movement in post-revolutionary Mexico. See Jocelyn Olcott, *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005). Women as teachers would be integral to revolutionary education in the 1920s and beyond. See Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1997).

homosexual) had served the regime as ambassadors, arbiters of taste, and symbols of Mexican progress abroad. As such their socio-political commitments were suspect and worthy of derision.

III. Roundups, Resistance, and Reprises of the Famous 41

At the same time that the Porfirian regime came under fire for its effeminate modernity, it was conducting raids against homosexuals, perhaps in part to reestablish its credibility as a source of order and to disassociate itself from male effeminacy.⁸⁴ After the Famous 41 and before the Revolution, other homosexual men faced detention due to their public appearance and behaviors; this was true in the capital and beyond, as the legacies of the November 1901 scandal were publicized and incorporated into the discursive fabric in other major urban centers. This did not stop men of the *ambiente* from socializing and seeking each other out in public.⁸⁵

Within three months of the November 1901 scandal, *El Popular* ran a whole series of stories on a reprise of the 41 that occurred in February 1902 on Coyuya street. Six men were dressed as women and six in men's clothing.⁸⁶ Posada made another broadsheet of this dance, which reused his image from the Famous 41, labeling them the "12", although this number would not carry the same weight as "41."⁸⁷ Outside the capital, periodic arrests of homosexuals caught the attention of both the local and national press. In April 1902, *La Patria* reported how the "evil" of homosexuality extended to Toluca, where Enrique Coto, a pharmacy salesclerk

⁸⁴ It also, as chapter 3 indicates, was brokering alliances with transnational organizations like the YMCA to help "build" the Mexican nation through physical education, so the claims that the nation had become "soft" did not go unheard.

⁸⁵ Both Mark Overmyer-Velázquez and Kathryn Sloan cited the same example of two men—*pulque* maker José Luz Valencia and laborer Rafael Castellanos—caught having sex in the northern door of the Oaxaca cathedral in 1889, showing the value that public spaces, even those associated with religious significance, had for queer interactions. Mark Overmyer-Velázquez, *Visions of the Emerald City: Modernity, Tradition, and the Formation of Porfirian Oaxaca, Mexico* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 106. See also Kathryn A Sloan, *Runaway Daughters: Seduction, Elopement, and Honor in Nineteenth-Century Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 199.

⁸⁶ See, for example, "Otro baile igual al de los 41," 1.

⁸⁷ The image is reprinted in Buffington, "Homophobia and the Mexican Working Class," 219. Part of the caption reads, "The people whistle at them and stone them."

“made the marital life (gross!) with the pharmacy’s porter” (emphasis in the original).⁸⁸ Coto rented a room specifically to have the freedom for sex, and “morning and afternoon” he satiated his desires there. Unfortunately, one of his lovers contracted a venereal disease and reported him to authorities. However, because the Estado de Mexico did not have a penalty for the “fault,” the men were released after three days.⁸⁹

Reports came from Veracruz as well. In May 1902, homosexual men became the subject of two reports in *El Dictamen*, a prominent local newspaper. The night of May 22, reported the paper, “was in fashion for *afeminados* and *clandestinas* (prostitutes). One would say there’s some rivalry between them and they have picked the Zócalo and tables in some pavilion in the Alameda as their center of activity.” Both places were so crowded that “decent people” complained. What was worse, according to the paper, was that the groups had some “advantage” with authorities and the pavilions’ workers and knew “how to exploit it.” Neither “the authorities that say nothing to them nor the waiters...want to do anything else than serve, spoil, and contemplate them.”⁹⁰ Not only were there queer men and female prostitutes together in the same spaces, they also competed for the affections of the very individuals who otherwise might have expelled them. Moreover, the two groups benefited from the same “advantage”, meaning that they were viewed in similarly desirable ways by the authorities and waiters. That these other men only wanted to “serve, spoil, and contemplate them” points to the allure that sex/gender and sexual “deviancy” invoked, and it also points to a form of alternative public sphere, one in which queerness—in this case read broadly to incorporate the *afeminados*, as well as the prostitutes—was the norm and “decent people” were those protesting from the periphery.

⁸⁸ The term used was *mozo*, which may indicate that Díaz was a young man.

⁸⁹ *La Patria* mentions that the DF also lacked laws penalizing homosexual activity, but that their Governor nevertheless sent such individuals away from the capital, rather than freeing them.

⁹⁰ “Cosas nocturnas,” *El Dictamen Pública*, May 24, 1902, 1.

Indeed, *El Dictamen* reported on the threat that queer behaviors had for the city of Veracruz in another article that same week. On the very day that the *afeminados* and prostitutes competed with each other for the attentions of the men in the plazas, the newspaper ran an article entitled “Restos de ‘los 41’.”⁹¹ The article stated that Veracruz had been “invaded” by a group of *afeminados*, “those degenerate sons of vice”, who were now owners and managers of cafes and arcades and who were contributing to the “decline” of Jarocho culture by “showing off part of what God has given them.” Rumor had it that the men were the “rest of the 41,” and the newspaper wondered by the police had not given them a beating and put them in line.” The answer, of course, was made clear later that night: the police, at least those near the areas in which queer men were congregating, were more interested in the men than in repressing them. Accusing queer men of being “the rest” of that group was a way to tie them to the scandal and to assert that homosexuality was something foreign from the port city; that is, the “foreign” in pre-Revolutionary Mexico was not simply that which originated outside of Mexico’s national borders, but it also could include that which came from somewhere else inside the country, particularly from the capital, given its status as a contact zone between the nation and the transnational. *El Dictamen*’s call for the men to be violently put in back in line thus mirrored the fate that befell the individuals arrested in the capital. Nevertheless, the prominence of queer culture in Veracruz unnerved the paper, and in this context the so-called “invasion” had already become substantial: not only were there queer men owning businesses and managing arcades, but they also were taking over the public spaces in which “decent” people wanted to congregate and doing so with the tacit acceptance and even support of the police and other, presumably “straight” men. Such acceptance raises the issue of these men’s own sexual desires. Were the

⁹¹ “Restos de ‘los 41’,” *El Dictamen Pública*, May 22, 1902, 1. Thirteen years later, the specter of the “41” would remain as a reference point for *El Dictamen* in describing cross-dressing queer men. See “Fue aprehendido por afeminado,” *El Dictamen*, August 12, 1915, 3.

men interested because the *afeminados* were showcasing more feminine attire and mannerisms, much like the prostitutes? Perhaps they able to be interested in queer men, at least covertly while being present in the plazas or pavilions, because the prostitutes helped legitimate the space as a not totally queer location, insofar as they offered heterosexual opportunities.⁹²

Roundups would continue in various urban centers in the lead-up to the Revolution. In August 1908, *El Diario* reported that police had raided “another dance of *afeminados*” and “orgy of the Famous 41.”⁹³ The new dance made the news in Guadalajara as well.⁹⁴ One of the men involved indignantly chastised the police in a high-pitched voice: “Don’t be rough with us and abuse us!” he exclaimed. Another reprise occurred in October 1913. A reserve policeman patrolling near the Calles de la Libertad at dawn heard the “discordant chords” of a suspicious neighborhood jam session.⁹⁵ Mixed with the sounds from the musicians were several voices that were “neither from a man nor from a woman.” Comprehending the scandalous origin of the voices, the ambitious policeman decided to “capture the androgynies.” He called for backup,

⁹² In either case, the visible, public presence of the queer men did not generate the same sort of scandal as it had in the capital in 1901, even as *El Dictamen* made reference to the event. Perhaps too many people were indifferent to queer men or found the story old news to warrant a more sustained response. Indeed, whether the police actually acted on the protests of the “decent people” represented by *El Dictamen* is not contained in the articles.

⁹³ “Otro baile de *afeminados* sorprendidos por la policía,” *El Diario*, August 27, 1908, 7.

⁹⁴ “Otro baile de *afeminados* en Mexico,” *La Gaceta de Guadalajara*, August 30, 1908, 11. Two months later in October 1908, *El Dictamen* reported from Veracruz that four young men of “doubtful conduct” were arrested that “every night went to the *malecón* and, by the light of the moon, carried out immoral acts. See “Un grupo de *afeminados*,” *El Dictamen*, October 22, 1908. Famous examples of *malecones*, which were stone-built esplanades along the Gulf of Mexico, can be found in Havana, Cuba, Puerto Vallarta, and the aforementioned Veracruz. Despite such arrests, Veracruz would remain a center of queer culture throughout the twentieth century because of Carnival. The examples from Veracruz (and Oaxaca) offer an important corrective to this history by showing how the experiences of queer men—and the efforts by authorities or “decent people” to challenge them—were not limited to the capital. Indeed, as further research will undoubtedly show, contemporary queer public and social spheres existed simultaneously in many Mexican cities. These spheres had their own local quirks and contexts, but they also were interconnected, whether through the movement of individuals or through discourses, as those citing the 41 in Veracruz show. In this way, more than the use of physical spaces overlapped, and similar discourses in different Mexican regions point to the emerging national character of understandings of homosexuality. These understandings developed at the intersections of journalism, medical jurisprudence, and popular culture in ways that showed both local character and trans-regional similarities. These intersections, as the next section argues, were themselves enmeshed into larger, transnational scales.

⁹⁵ The term used is *murga*, which translates roughly as a “bad group of musicians”, i.e., a group without much talent.

then he and his fellow agents burst into the scene, finding “eight individuals dressed as women and with faces painted white and colored with rouge”.

The eight men were rounded up and taken to the reserve police station “in the ridiculous clothing in which they were found,” reported *Excelsior*. There they were held strictly *incomunicado* until eight the next morning—“the hour in which they were made to remove the women’s clothing.”⁹⁶ After which, authorities decided to send them to the headquarters located on the Calle de la Canoa, “where they were at the disposal of the Military Command” and “all were consigned into ranks, with the objective that they acquire manly behaviors” through military service, which given the time period meant they were heading into the Federal Army under Victoriano Huerta during some of the bloodiest parts of the Revolution.⁹⁷

Simply by holding the party, the eight men arrested had challenged the system. Most likely, they would have gone unnoticed had their party ended earlier in the evening or early morning; or, had their music not been wafting still at dawn, they might have escaped the policeman’s trap. That in the end they were taken away to the police station, and then conscripted into military service did not lessen their act of courage, whether intentional or not, to have sought an evening’s pleasure in the company of other *afeminados*. Moreover, that the party was attempted suggests that other parties had been held successfully previously and that the risks were worth the benefits. Indeed, that only a few parties made the headlines does not mean that there were not others going on; instead, most likely it means that few were discovered.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ “Un baile de hombres vestidos de mujer,” *El Diario*, October 10, 1913, 7.

⁹⁷ “Consignado a las armas,” *El Pais*, October 10, 1913, 7; John Womack, “The Mexican Revolution, 1910-1920,” in *The Cambridge History of Latin America: c. 1870-1930*, ed. Leslie Bethell (London: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 98-100.

⁹⁸ It is possible that some diaries or letters might shed light on this, and there are references at times to parties in memoirs of individuals who were queer; thus, there could be more sources, but finding them will be a painstaking process.

As the major campaigns in the Mexican Revolution concluded after the battle of Celaya and other victories won by the Carrancistas, the “battle” against *afeminados* reignited in the capital, as well as in other sites in the country. Rather than being impressed into the military as they had been during the earlier stages of the Revolution, the men described in press articles were instead imprisoned or relegated to the Islas Mariás penal colony. *El Pueblo* reported in December 1916 that six more had been apprehended by the police as they met for a party; all were sent to Lecumberri prison.⁹⁹ Less than two months later, a newswire from Colima reported that crowds booed a group of “forsaken” *afeminados* that had just arrived in the port of Manzanillo on their way to the Islas Mariás.¹⁰⁰ The following month, police apprehended fourteen “degenerates,” most of which were “disguised as women” in Guadalajara. The article reported that they would be deported to the Islas Mariás, “as a warning to the many degenerates that abound in these parts.”¹⁰¹ The report also invoked the Famous 41’s legacy by mentioned Nacho de la Torre by name as one of the “protagonists” of the infamous ball and by likening the new arrests in Guadalajara those in 1901. So powerful was the legacy and the stigma of being associated with it that on March 14, 1919, *El Pueblo* published a correction from Felipe Moreno Arenas, a man who asserted he was not the Felipe M. Arenas that had been named as part of the *afeminados* apprehended two nights before in a house in Colonia Roma. Moreno sought to clear his name and escape possible legal and social ramifications.¹⁰²

These examples show how both before and after the Revolution, roundups targeted homosexual men. The Revolution itself did not intensify the roundups, nor did it stop them.

⁹⁹ “Siete aprehensiones más de hombres afeminados,” *El Pueblo*, December 29, 1916, 4. It seems that this raid may have occurred after others some days before, given a reference in the article, although I have yet to find any information on it.

¹⁰⁰ “Fueron silbados los afeminados,” *El Pueblo*, February 3, 1917. I devote Chapter 5 to the penal colony.

¹⁰¹ “Afeminados aprehendidos,” *El Pueblo*, March 17, 1917, 4.

¹⁰² “Una justa aclaración,” *El Pueblo*, March 14, 1919, 3.

Despite the threat of being impressed into military service during the bloody war or exiled from the metropole to the Islas Marías, homosexual men continued to hold their gatherings. Such acts, given the climate and legacy of the Famous 41, carried political weight for critics even as they also carried other meanings for the men involved. And if the men did not specifically assert a militant homosexual identity in public—that we know of—that self-consciously was intended to thwart other definitions of masculine citizenship, their acts were *understood* as political acts by mainstream society. We should be willing to give them, then, the benefit of the doubt that they did know the ramifications of their actions, even if these were not the most important considerations for them when attending a party.

IV: Case Study: Cruising in the Capital, 1901-1920

Despite the roundups and ridicule that they received in the public sphere, men continued seeking each other out in public spaces. This section investigates the ways that public spaces including parks, plazas, and the street were used by Mexican men as sites for cruising, sex, and friendly interactions in Mexico City. These uses are known, aside from a few references in queer memoirs, largely because of the moments when they became most visible, i.e., when outsiders learned of them. Thus, the section also interrogates how much the general public—as well as the police and journalists—knew about the queer social spaces that overlapped with other social spheres and uses of the same spaces. Such knowledge also could empower queer-curious individuals by illuminating the spaces in which they might enter social spheres populated by *afeminados*; that is, individuals seeking out others for queer interactions could learn much from mainstream sources, even though these routinely derided the queer men they described.

Homosexuals in the Zócalo and Centro

On the night of April 2, 1906, police arrested thirty *maricones*. The men had been meandering through the Zócalo in groups of two or more, presumably enjoying the mild weather common to Mexico City in the spring, socializing with friends, and on the make for a romantic or sexual encounter. Night after night, such men “installed themselves on the benches of the Cathedral’s portico, Zócalo, and Alameda”, eventually attracting police and press attention.¹⁰³ Unfortunately, no mention is made of the social or racial backgrounds of the men, their ages, or their appearance (i.e., whether or not they were dressed effeminately). Yet, as the article attests, we can know that queer men claimed the right to enjoy the city’s public spaces like any other Mexican, including those spaces with historic or contemporary political, cultural, and religious importance. For queer men, streets, parks, and plazas—particularly those in the city center where the Cathedral, Zócalo¹⁰⁴, and Alameda park were located—served as vital meeting sites. In such spaces, queer men could socialize with other queer men, meet friends, and find sex, whether with other queer men or “normal” men who, looking for their own sexual satisfaction, were at times socialized into the queer world. In this way, the experiences of Mexican queer men differed little from the experiences of their contemporaries in Rio de Janeiro, New York, or London.¹⁰⁵

Men had already been using the Zócalo and Alameda Park at the turn of the century for cruising zones. During the aftermath of the Famous 41 scandal, a letter—possibly fabricated or embellished by journalists at *El Popular*—between “Concho” and “Alfredo” noted how Concho had cruised Alfredo in both places and lamented he would no longer be able to do so following

¹⁰³ “Aprehensión de 30 maricones,” *El País*, April 4, 1906, 1.

¹⁰⁴ A large plaza located few blocks east of the Alameda. Also known as the Plaza de la Constitución and the Plaza Mayor, the Zócalo serves as Mexico City’s central plaza. Since colonial times, the plaza has been the site of important religious, political, and economic functions; the Cathedral, National Palace, and several municipal and economic institutions flank its perimeter. In more recent times, it has served as a center of political demonstrations and tourism, particularly since the 1960s and after the “discovery” of Aztec ruins nearby.

¹⁰⁵ On Rio de Janeiro, see James N. Green, *Beyond Carnival: Male Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). On New York, see Chauncey, *Gay New York*. On London, see Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

his arrest.¹⁰⁶ In 1910, *La Patria* described how a “social plague” of homosexuals had colonized the Zócalo and the atrium of the Cathedral; the latter circulated around the public square night after night.¹⁰⁷ Seven years later, men were still cruising the area. Twenty-one year-old Teófilo Ceron Martínez, a single and homeless young man originally of San Juan de Aragón, was arrested by police in December 1917 on the charge of being an *afeminado*, having been found in an area known for men soliciting other men for sex.¹⁰⁸

What made the Zócalo, like the Alameda and later parks and plazas, popular for cruising was their *ambiente*, i.e., their physical and social environment and their opportunities for sexual deviance.¹⁰⁹ In physical terms, both sites were characterized by tree and bush-lined paths, gardens, and benches upon which individuals could sit, watching people as they passed by. Such features also offered a measure of privacy; a potential trick could be cruised and then taken into the bushes for more discretion, while passersby remained oblivious. In addition, parks could offer a different kind of “privacy in public” in which men, who did not fit the normal stereotype of an *afeminado*, could co-exist with other, non-queer users of the park, while still pursuing his desires for sex or socialization with friends, because they were assumed to be “normal” on the

¹⁰⁶ “Las cartas de los 41,” *El Popular*, December 1, 1901; reprinted in Robert McKee Irwin, Ed McCaughan, and Michelle Rocio Nasser, *The Famous 41: Sexuality and Social Control in Mexico, 1901* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 31. Even if the letter was fabricated or embellished, it offers public knowledge of the Zócalo and Alameda as cruising grounds.

¹⁰⁷ “Plagas sociales,” *La Patria*, October 28, 1910, 4.

¹⁰⁸ “Carcel Municipal, Calificacion Listas y Planillas de Detenidos, Mes de diciembre (1917),” December 1917, Vol 2685, file 5. Justicia. Carceles. Planillas y Listos de Detenidos, AHDF. It is possible the young man was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time, but his presence in an area known for sexual activity between men likely made him a more prominent target for police. Many thanks to Katherine Bliss for pointing me to this reference in our email conversations.

¹⁰⁹ Both pairs and larger groups of queer men congregated in both the Alameda and Zócalo. This suggests that both romantic and amorous couplings, as well as more friendly interactions, occurred in public. That is, that the sites served as at least informal community sites for queer friends to spend time together, as well as sites where men could mingle with other men, promenading along the leafy paths of the parks and plazas looking for their next trick, lover, or companion.

basis of their behavior, mannerisms, or manner of speaking.¹¹⁰ Queer interactions occurred in spaces shared straight men and women were seeking similar romantic or sexual connections together; the presence of straight interactions legitimated and partially occluded the queer presence. According to *El País* in 1906, female *mesalinas* (prostitutes) appeared at night, “pervading like bats” the same sights as the *maricones*.¹¹¹ Both could still be found there in 1910.¹¹² Relations between the prostitutes and queer men were not always amicable; indeed, *afeminados* and *sodomitas* “competed with female prostitutes for access to male clientele in this downtown area.”¹¹³ Both female street-walkers and homosexuals remained in the Zócalo at least until the late 1910s; by the mid-1920s, the trees, bushes, and benches that littered the plaza had been removed, leaving a more open environment less conducive to interactions.

In this way, the social spheres of “sexual deviants”—straight and queer—overlapped, creating an atmosphere in which diverse desires could be satisfied and socio-cultural norms could be contested through sex.¹¹⁴ Moreover, queer Mexicans who sought sex in public were enacting their own version of a common practice; when faced with limits imposed by crowded living conditions and the demands of family life and other social obligations, individuals turned

¹¹⁰ George Chauncey describes the “privacy in public” found by men in New York, particularly in his chapter 7. See Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 179-205. For a Latin American comparison, see James Green’s work on Brazil, especially chapter 1: Green, *Beyond Carnival*.

¹¹¹ “Aprehensión de 30 maricones,” 1. Mesalinas were powerful, promiscuous women. Probably the word in this case refers to prostitutes, given that the women came out at night. The term comes from Valeria Mesalina, the third wife of the Roman emperor Claudius. She was a powerful woman known for both her promiscuity and treachery, as she conspired against her husband. Apparently by 1911, the Zócalo had become so overgrown with trees and bushes that prostitutes even entertained their clients by day. See Katherine Elaine Bliss, *Compromised Positions: Prostitution, Public Health, and Gender Politics in Revolutionary Mexico City* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 65. In Veracruz, men frequented public locations similar in name and atmosphere to their counterparts in the capital, cruising each other in plazas like the tree-filled Plaza de Armas (The Zócalo) and the palm tree lined Alameda. Like in the capital, these spaces were shared with others, including prostitutes offering their own deviant sexual opportunities to men. See “Cosas nocturnas,” 1.

¹¹² “Plagas sociales,” 1.

¹¹³ Bliss, *Compromised Positions*, 90. For the area’s general ambience, “Justicia. Cárceles. Planillas y listos de detenidos,” vol. 2684, file 1, report 142.

¹¹⁴ In Brazil, a similar overlapping occurred in Rio de Janeiro. See chapter 1 of Likewise, Chauncey noted a similar overlapping in New York, as well as competition between female prostitutes and male queers. See Chauncey, *Gay New York*.

to the street and parks as major venues for socialization, sexual or otherwise. Such overlapping between queer and “normal” social/sexual spheres would continue to occur during subsequent years in other areas in the Centro known for prostitution, nightlife, and bohemian culture.¹¹⁵

That such queer sexual interactions occurred in spaces of national, cultural, and religious importance and prestige in the historic center of Mexico City and symbolic center of the Mexican nation is remarkable. More remarkable is that they persisted—and/or were allowed to persist by authorities—in such visible sites that were frequented by Mexicans of all statuses, as well as foreign visitors alike. These and other public spaces, both important and mundane, would continue to be claimed for use by Mexicans—queer and “normal” alike—throughout the century. Likewise, public demonstrations of sexuality, particularly that deemed “deviant”, would continue to draw the ire of middle-class reformers, the police, and journalists who sought to project their own vision of Mexican respectability onto the city and its inhabitants.

Invertidos In and Around the Alameda, 1900-1922

One of the most popular cruising sites was the Alameda Central, a park was designed to be a meeting and leisure space for the city’s denizens from across the social spectrum.¹¹⁶ In that capacity, it functioned well, as city-dwellers across class lines enjoyed the park’s leafy pathways, opportunities for relaxation and recreation, and cultural events, such as music performances. The Alameda was also an important site for romance. Young men and women paraded there in

¹¹⁵ These included the infamous Cuauhtemotzín street, the area around the Plaza Garibaldi, and San Juan de Letran street. I describe the overlapping in other spaces in Chapters 4 and 7.

¹¹⁶ The Alameda Central was founded at the end of the 16th century by Viceroy Luis de Velasco and originally named for the popular trees (*Alamos*) that lined its walkways.¹¹⁶ After years of decline, the park was renovated again during Bourbon rule in the 18th century. Fountains were added, and the park was expanded. By the 19th century, Empress Carlota became enamored with the Alameda, donating the fountain of Venus and ordering that the park be beautified with flowers. In the 1860s, gas-lighting was added by Benito Juárez and the park’s walls demolished in order to reduce crime. By the end of the century, electric lights were added and further improvements were made, including a bandstand and central kiosk. Porfirio Díaz added the Palacio de Bellas Artes on the eastern edge of the park, as well as the Hemicycle of Juárez, a monument to the earlier president, at the turn of the twentieth century.

elaborate patterns, casting looks and gestures under the watchful eyes of family members, hoping to start a new love.¹¹⁷ Queer Mexicans used the park as well, often at the same time as other Mexicans, as a prime site for socialization, community building, and recreation.¹¹⁸ Friends could meet and catch up on gossip or the previous night's antics. From their perches on the park's benches, they also had excellent vantage points to watch the young men parading by. Since Sundays were the traditional days of rest for workers, and thus, the days in which family interactions was most common, an Sunday outing in a park was also a time in which family duties could be met simultaneously to the discrete surveillance of other like-minded men. After a chance encounter during such an outing—made briefly at known queer meeting spots, such as a particular fountain or statue—later meetings could be set up without disrupting time with the family or friends.¹¹⁹ Engaging in “*de conquista*” or “*andar por rodeo*”—i.e., cruising—in the parks leafy by-ways was a common occurrence; men would either walk around checking out the scene or wait for other men to pass by, seated on the numerous benches.¹²⁰

Thus, the Alameda was a space in which multiple uses overlapped, including those not intended by the park's designers or promoters intended. Such behaviors were, when discovered, assailed in the press because they threatened fictions that viewed the park—and more natural settings in general—as inherently wholesome.¹²¹ Yet, authorities would never fully control—let

¹¹⁷ For the use of Mexico City's parks, see for example Rubén Gallo, ed., *The Mexico City Reader* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 223.; Diego Rivera's painting *Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in the Alameda Park* (1947-48), which combined Mexican popular culture and iconic figures with the Mexican ritual of recreation in the park; and Peter Standish and Steven M. Bell, *Culture and Customs of Mexico* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2004), 59-60.

¹¹⁸ Matt Houlbrook noted similar processes of socialization and community building, such as those in Hyde Park, in his study of London. See Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 55. According to Houlbrook, limiting the discussion of parks' significance to queer communities to only sex “fails to adequately comprehend their place within public queer cultures.”

¹¹⁹ One popular site was after this period was the statue of Beethoven, a gift from the city's German colony in 1921, which would become a meeting point for queer men; passing by the statue and “making eyes” at another man could initiate future interactions, including sex, which could be had in the park's more private areas.

¹²⁰ See for example “Por andar de rodeo,” *Excelsior*, December 30, 1919.

¹²¹ This was already a dubious claim because of the nude statues present in the park.

alone eliminate—the homosexual behaviors occurring there, precisely because such behaviors could be masked with more “appropriate” park uses, such as time spent with friends or family. The Alameda that would remain a prominent queer cruising site for men during the century.¹²²

What is known about the interactions between queer men there is fragmentary at best; few queer men, aside from middle-class writers like Salvador Novo, left their own observations. Other sources, such as newspaper articles, only offer a limited, necessarily biased perspective on queer life, as they reported on the few moments in which police or journalists were able to penetrate the *ambiente*. What is clear, however, is that cruising occurred, even if not all sexual interactions initiated there occurred in the park. Novo recalled in his memoirs the stories told by “Chavitos”, a former police inspector general, about men’s escapades during Porfiriato. One story focused on a rich old man, father of many children, who would “install himself in the Alameda” where he would “throw pesos forcefully to the ground” so that the many “ragged, barefoot men followed him home”. When one of his sons surprised him in the act, “on all fours, with his white beard on the floor, the man killed himself.”¹²³

Other men would cruise in the park during the Revolution. On the night of October 2, 1917, a watchman found an *invertido* and took him to a nearby policeman, stating that the other “was enamored with him and that between hitting him or delivering him to the police, [the *invertido*] would prefer the latter.” Another policeman surprised the second *maricón* as he was cruising [*de conquista*] in the park, announcing that he was an “agent of the police that had been

¹²² Queer men continue using the park today, although for some men—particularly of the middle and upper classes, it has been eclipsed by other areas in the city.

¹²³ Novo does not specify if the men that the old man lured were queer themselves or if the money was their primary motive for following him. Either way, they were agreeable to same-sex interactions, and such activity likely could not have continued for long without the old man gaining a reputation, so it is possible that the men sought him out, playing the role that he wanted of them, based on what they heard from others. Whatever their motive, the set-up worked well for all involved, as the class-disparity between the men was part of the overall attraction for the older man and may have been the same for the other men who followed him home. The young men may also have been hustlers or prostitutes.

sent to the Alameda to persecute this calamity” of same-sex cruising in which the *maricón* participated. Observed *Excelsior*, if the case “were not repugnant, it would be perfectly laughable.” Both *invertidos* were taken to the Procuraduria for “moral faults.”¹²⁴

Unfortunately, the article offers only a little information about the arrested *invertidos*. The men were found in separate areas of the park, suggesting that there was not only a single location of queer interaction in the Alameda. Both were allegedly characterized by an “outrageous rudeness” that they manifested by “smiling femininely, as if it were a joke or trick” upon arriving at the police station. In other words, both were exhibiting a version of camp in their behavior, thus fulfilling the behavioral stereotype of queer men. One carried a bag in which the police found a dead hummingbird. When asked about the bird, he “winked his eyes, smiling repugnantly, and with a high-pitched voice, said: ‘it is my talisman of love.’” Nothing is said about the men’s social status.

We are also left to wonder how long had the first *invertido* been interested in the guard, assuming his interest was genuine, as well as the nature of such attraction. Was his interest based on the man’s physical appearance or uniform? Was it based on previous interactions between the two men, admiration from afar, or a momentary fancy? Or was the confession of being enamored an effort to avoid violence, much as the *invertido*’s choice of being turned over to the police was? As to the second man, again it is unknown whether he was a regular in the park who had been caught or someone relatively new and unfamiliar enough to be caught.¹²⁵

Following *invertidos*’ apprehension the Inspector General proposed to pursue “these repugnant types and prevent them from making spectacles in the public pathways.”¹²⁶ Such

¹²⁴ “Un sodomita enamorado de un velador,” *Excelsior*, October 3, 1917, 4. The charge was *faltas a la moral*.

¹²⁵ If the police in plain clothes, they might have been more able to conduct a covert sting to net homosexuals, particularly if they were posing as them themselves. That is, the story may have been one of entrapment.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

pronouncements calling for social reform were frequently made, but it is unclear if they had a lasting impact.¹²⁷ Given that other articles detailing raids would appear in succeeding years, it is more likely that the pronouncement was just a token one and that subsequent raids either netted no one of interest to periodicals or were not carried out with any regularity. Two arrests, in comparison with the larger arrests described above, did little to alter the cruising patterns.

Indeed, homosexuals continued congregating in the Alameda Central. Police apprehended six men on the “infamous suspicion of being *afeminados*” on the night of May 11, 1919. Some of the men had been walking along the shadowy interior paths of the park, while others sat on benches lining these paths, “having suspicious conversations.” When confronted by the police, two of the men—Felipe Mendoza Sánchez and Arturo Aguilar Zarate—“confessed with total cynicism that they were *maricones*,” while the remaining men “protested with energy that they didn’t belong to that guild.” According to the article, their “crime” could not be proven without the confession—suggesting that the men did not have the outward appearance or mannerisms of stereotypical *afeminados*; thus the latter group was released. This of course did not mean that the men were not involved in homosexual activity or had not sought out the *afeminados*, only that they were able to effectively deny their alleged complicity. In contrast, Mendoza and Aguilar were “consigned, so that upon them would be imposed the punishment that they merited for having done no honor to their sex.”¹²⁸ Their crime was being “failed” men.

A number of unanswered questions remain. First, why did the two *afeminados* confess at all, given the consequences such as jail, forced labor, exile, or violence that faced? Perhaps they did so because they were coerced or under some threat of violence or harassment that they wanted to avoid that was less desirable than the alternative of being arrested. Perhaps there was

¹²⁷ The absence of articles on arrested homosexuals in some years may be due to a number of factors, ranging from disinterest among the editorial staffs at newspapers to a lull in the use of the park by queer men.

¹²⁸ “Detención de *afeminados*,” *Excelsior*, May 12, 1919, 7.

some benefit to their confession; perhaps they hoped to arrange opportunities for further interaction with the policemen or saw imprisonment as an opportunity. The men also may have been of sufficient social stature that they knew such a confession carried little consequence, as there was money and prestige to literally bail them out of jail. Unfortunately, few details about their appearance, behavior, and social status remain that might shed light on what occurred, why only the two men were arrested, and how the others were freed.

However, we can analyze what the article does offer. For example, the other men's rejection of *afeminado* status raises several possibilities. Perhaps they were not *afeminados* nor interested in homosexuality—and thus innocent of the alleged crime. By denying being *afeminados*, they thus sought to mitigate negative consequences of being in the wrong place at the wrong time or challenges to their own masculinity. Or, the rejection may have been a means to self-preservation by men who did not view themselves as *afeminados*, but nevertheless had sought homosexual activity with the more visible *afeminados* and were fortunate enough to escape. Still another possibility is that the rejection came from other queer men who identified with their sexuality but not with the gendered personas associated with *afeminados*—nor the assertion of identity made through their confession as *afeminados*.¹²⁹ If true, these queer, non-*afeminados* were thus willing to let the other men be arrested for their difference and perceived or actual gender transgression. The men were still able to pass as “normal” for police and the press because they did not confess to being an *afeminado*, nor have that confession made by their appearance or mannerisms; their rejection, thus, could be read as an early form of resistance distinct from outright rejection of homosexual behavior, but still including elements of an internalized homophobia against their more feminine counterparts.

¹²⁹ If this were the case, it would be akin to the distinction emerging between “fairies” and “queers” that Chauncey described in New York at the same moment in history; see Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 14-19.

More interesting is the “cynicism” of the two *afeminados*, which could also be read as an open acceptance of who they were, meaning that they had some sort of personal identity awareness based on their status *as afeminados*. In this way, they turned the tables on the police, at least discursively, by embracing the status of *afeminado* as something positive, forcing *Excelsior* to label them as “cynics”, as such a move confounded their understanding and moral sensibilities. That the men confessed complicates our understanding of Mexican homosexuality during the period because the general assumption has been that men would deny homosexual activity in order to avoid the sanctions levied by authorities, the press, and society against the *afeminados*. In fact, the confession should be read as a form of “coming out”, in so far as it was a public acknowledgement of sexual difference as related to personal identity. If we assume that the men’s real names were published in the press, some meaning in the confession must have existed to warrant the very real repercussions that followed.¹³⁰

Moreover, it cannot be assumed—given the lack of description so common to other articles decrying *afeminados*—that the men were even outwardly visible *as afeminados*. Their acceptance of the term may not have signified allegiance to other men for whom feminine personas and accoutrements were interesting, but instead their recognition of same-sex desire as a major orientation in their lives and the motive for their presence in the park. That is to say, that by accepting the moniker *afeminado*, the men may have been giving it their own nuanced meaning distinct from the understanding of the term by the police or the press, thereby resisting, at least in a small measure, the power being exercised over them and subverting the definitions

¹³⁰ Unless, of course, the names were fictional and released in order to bolster the claims that police were actively working against the problem. Even still, by releasing the names and stating that a confession had occurred, the stage was set for a positive reading of the “outing”.

of the term being ascribed to them.¹³¹ Indeed, that the other men who were released viewed *afeminados* as a “guild” points to the emerging conception of the queer individual as a definable type who was a member of a queer larger community. By embracing their status as members of the *afeminado* guild, the two arrested men affirmed their difference from other men, just as the latter affirmed their difference from the stereotypical queer men.

It was often when the overlapping between queer and “decent” uses of the park occurred that sanctions were levied. In December 1919, four more homosexuals—Fidel Pérez, Daniel Juárez, Juan Pérez, and Carlos Matlock—were surprised in the Alameda, “molesting the passersby” while they were in the process of cruising (*andar de rodeo*).¹³² All four were consigned into the authority of the Distrito Federal for “having been proved that they are *afeminados*.”¹³³ What constituted proof was not specified. While the first three men were only named, Matlock, in contrast, was identified as a geologic engineer, a profession marking him at least in the middle-class. Beyond that description, little detail remains about the men, how they were dressed, how they acted, nor what their social status was. However, their amorous antics were enough to elicit police sanction, and in Matlock’s case, it can be assumed that in his day-to-day activities, he was not dressed in feminine clothing nor using overly effeminate mannerisms, as both would have elicited ridicule and consequences in his work. He may have passed like other professional homosexuals during his work-week, while engaging in more transgressive affairs in the park at other times.

¹³¹ Ibid. Chauncey demonstrated how processes of redefinition occurred in New York with the terms “queer”, “gay”, and “fairy”, with the words signifying different realities to the men who used them personally or in-community, versus outsiders who used them as descriptions (often derogatory) of the men.

¹³² This is the same process that straight individuals were also doing, i.e., walking around, surveying the people present, and hoping to make a connection.

¹³³ “Por andar de rodeo,” 2.

Homosexuals would continue meeting in the Alameda, despite of the raids—and perhaps because of them, given the information that press reports provided to prospective men who might have wanted to find areas of *ambiente* and for whom the threat of arrest may have added a heightened illicit thrill to their actions. In other words, the threats of arrest and violence did not outweigh the benefits of queer interactions, at least for the men who continued to utilize the park. In fact, given the time between reported roundups, it was more likely than not to be able to have a queer encounter without police intervention or public notice. The Alameda thus proved an important place for queer interactions because it was common for individuals of all classes to be present there, enjoying what the park had to offer. Conversations could be had with friends or strangers on park benches and along its pergolas. Cruising was common, and despite continued police intervention, continued. In the following decades, the knowledge of the Alameda as a queer site would grow, and men famous and mundane would use it for their interests.

Pleasures and Perils of Crossing Class Boundaries: “Poshing” and Rough Trade

Perhaps due to the risks that could accompany sex in public, some queer Mexicans turned to private spaces for their interactions, once they had made contact in the streets, rather than remaining in public. These spaces also served as important community sites for men, as well as a safe haven to be themselves away from the public eye. In particular, residences, offices, and boarding houses owned by wealthier Mexicans were important social sites for the queer community, whether for sex or for friendly socialization. In these sites, cross-class interactions occurred; many of the young men procured for sex or socialized into the queer community were from lower middle-class and lower-class backgrounds, in contrast to their middle and upper-class patrons. Relationships also occurred across class and age lines—such as an older, wealthier man offering support to a younger, poor man—although no strict binaries were established. Such sites

were also important in part because of their proximity to the cruising and public community sites; in this way, the barriers between public and private were porous, allowing for men to transition between various sites in the pursuit of their pleasures.

Several residences near the Alameda were particularly important. Salvador Novo heard the story about the old man and his trail of pesos mentioned above while at the apartment of Antonio Adalid and his younger lover Antonio (ages 53 and 28 at the time Novo described), who lived near the San Fernando gardens at Avenida Hidalgo 123, a short distance northwest of the Alameda between Heroes and Guerrero streets. The elder Antonio's queer notoriety earned him the ire of his father, who for a time disinherited him and forced him into exile in the United States.¹³⁴ Later, after things had quieted down, Adalid returned to Mexico and took up residence at his Hidalgo apartment, which like similar homes and apartments nearby, served as the social "home" for Novo and his friends, satisfying "the need for frank and open companionship in which we could indulge our confidential loquacity."¹³⁵

Another visitor to the Antonios' house was Dr. Land, an "enormous, bald Swede with the voice of a soprano" who worked as a masseur. Land lived even closer to the park than the Antonios, brewing his "sweet but terribly strong liquors" in a house across from the park. Novo recognized the location as a fortuitous one, and like he did with other older, wealthier men who owned houses, Novo sought to make use of it. He recalled that

Once I solicited his hospitality in order to fuck with a bus conductor whom I'd just met. Dr. Land opened the door and disappeared while I brought the *pelado* inside.¹³⁶ And when I was in the process of stripping him, the doctor reappeared with a tray of his

¹³⁴ Novo, *La estatua de sal*, 107-110.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 104-105.

¹³⁶ This is a derogatory term for poor people; as Novo uses it, it includes the meaning of "rough trade", which was Novo's preferred type of men, i.e., lower-class, coarser and less educated men. Current equivalents in Spanish, although not limited to use in homoerotic contexts, would be *naco* or *chacal*.

liquors: he gave a shout and dropped the tray, extremely alarmed, convinced that this shabby bruiser could kill me.¹³⁷

Land's fearful response was due to the size and lower class-status of the man that Novo was undressing. While men of the lower classes might have interested some wealthier men, there was also concern about violence directed against homosexual men, particularly those who were visibly so. Much of this violence could come from the very "real men", many of whom were from the lower classes, that *afeminados* encountered in the streets or sought out as sexual partners. These same men also could be informants for the police or even policemen themselves in disguise. By bringing him to Land's residence, Novo had allowed the other man to penetrate the wealthier queer social sphere. Land's response suggests these fears of violence or abuse, whether Land himself had experienced them or had heard or read about them elsewhere. Novo, as an essentially free-loading youth, risked much less than did someone like Land with his reputation and wealth, even if the majority of cross-class interactions were harmless and mutually agreeable and Land was expressing concerns based on classist prejudices.

To be fair, it seems that the *pelado* was attracted not only by the sex, but also the opportunity to go what I have coined *poshing*—i.e., the opposite of *slumming*—through which individuals from the lower classes used sex or other means to gain entrance into wealthier areas and enjoy experiences more common to those of the wealthier classes, even if only for a short time.¹³⁸ Interactions between queer men and other men often involved a calculus that included class and race—as well as how those categories were experienced—as part of the interactions appeal. It is reasonable to conclude that such a calculus was not only deployed by wealthier or

¹³⁷ Ibid., 113. Novo may have been being playful with the last, suggesting that his *pelado* was a "big guy" in more than one sense, as Novo did enjoy sizeable men.

¹³⁸ "Poshing" is a provisional term for this phenomenon. "Slumming" was a common practice of the wealthy and middle-classes to go out for transgressive experiences among the poor, racial minorities, and sexual minorities, enjoying the liminal spaces that these groups created in their own neighborhoods, such as bars, music clubs, and cabarets. See for example on slumming in the United States Chad Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

middle-class individuals but also from the popular classes. In other words, the “real men” who were “seduced” may have been seducing the queer men at the same time, and, like the wealthier men who fetishized lower-class men, they may have fetishized wealthier men.

Of course, Land’s prejudices were not entirely unfounded, and it was often prudent to be cautious. Wealthier *afeminados* and men accused of being *afeminados* were targets for extortion. *Excelsior* reported in September 1917 the exploitation of individuals by “*Sociedad Explotadora de Afeminados*” (Society for the Exploitation of *Afeminados*). The “thieves” of the society earned money through extortion by threatening an individual with a disclosure of queer sexual impropriety. Police learned of the extortion ring due to José del Raso, a medical student and “honorable person”—i.e., not an *afeminado*—who was employed in a city commissary. Del Raso had received an anonymous note from the Society at his house. The note stated at 9 pm on Friday, September 28 he was to be at the Alameda park where he would find an individual seated in front of the Agencia Gayosso (a funeral services company). The note instructed him to give the individual, who del Raso would know by the black ribbon tied to his jacket sleeve, two hundred pesos, because if he did not, the Society would “discredit and defame him, attributing to him all of the defects of degenerate and dishonorable people.” What is more, the Society would inform his girlfriend, his parents, his friends, and his classmates of his “atrocities”.¹³⁹

Once alerted by del Raso, police were waiting when a man appeared at 9 pm and tranquilly took his place on the appropriate bench to wait. Police and del Raso moved in and discovered it was none other than Crisando Torres, del Raso’s friend. “How is it possible that you are doing this?” del Raso asked. “Necessity, brother,” replied Torres, noting that some individuals he knew only by sight “send me to claim [the money] and later they pay me my

¹³⁹ “Un nuevo timo para hacer caer a los timoratos: la “Sociedad Explotadora de Afeminados” amenaza con el deshonor si no se le entrega dinero,” *Excelsior*, September 29, 1917, 1. This would not be the only “society” created to exploit queer men or other men labeled as queer. See chapter 7 for more examples.

commission.”¹⁴⁰ At the police station, Torres repeated that he had carried out similar collection assignments on a number of other people who had given him the money without comment. He declined to say who his accomplices were, and remained detained pending action by authorities.

Using the information Torres provided, the police had already caught two more men by the time of the article’s publication a day later. Notwithstanding these arrests, the public were warned to be on the look out for similar tactics and not to fall victim to the “rascals” who belonged to the Society by giving in to their threats and handing over money. Instead, the public was urged to seek help from authorities, so that the thieves would abandon their new means of acquiring money as too unprofitable for them.

Torres and his associates had constructed a successful extortion ring that leveraged the social and potential legal consequences of queer sexuality for money.¹⁴¹ Such an accusation, whether true or not, could have a devastating impact on an individual. Indeed, among the men who had already paid the bribes likely were actual *afeminados* and other queer men who were not known—or admitted—to be so by their families, friends, or colleagues, as well as individuals who wanted to keep their sexual proclivities or indiscretions at a minimum. Such men were not chosen at random; Torres, after all, picked his own friend del Raso, and targeting a poor man or man without social status, whether he was an *afeminado* or not, would not have been as lucrative as targeting a middle-class or wealthier individual. Nor was the choice of the Alameda random. Not only were there numerous queer men known to frequent these locations, many lived nearby, and those that did were wealthy. The Alameda’s “privacy-in-public” also offered a measure of cover for extortionists, who could appear as just another normal denizen using the park and who could have used the parks overlapping social spaces as a means to occlude their own aims.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 2.

¹⁴¹ The extortion ring—if it was truly more than just Torres himself—was designed in a cellular format, i.e., so that individual members could not implicate the whole organization should they be caught.

In sum, the Alameda—and its surrounding residential neighborhoods—were focal points of cruising and community, whether an individual was from “above” or “below.” Wealthy men, middle-class men, and “ragged youths” and workers could utilize the park to gain access to the opportunities presented by both the cruising and community: enthusiastic sex, monetary gain, even cultural experience. While a trip to the Alameda and environs could mean for people like the old man in Chavito’s story or Novo a chance to cross class lines to obtain their preferred sexual partners, it also offered the chance for men of the lower classes to enjoy a “mini-vacation” in an alternative socio-cultural environment.

Of course, not all of these interactions were friendly, and sexual liaisons between men of different classes or backgrounds also enabled possibilities for criminal activity. By engaging men outside the *ambiente*, homosexuals opened themselves up for forms of abuse; in this way, the socialization of a new individual bore a measure of risk, such as the threat of extortion or arrest by the police. Nevertheless, the boundaries between social sectors in Mexico City were disrupted, even queered, in the interactions that occurred or were localized around the park. In this way, queer experiences at the Alameda were an important vector in which such social boundaries, as well as codes of public and moral respectability, were permeated and contested.

Conclusion

The sections in this chapter have investigated homosexuality and the experiences of *afeminados* from a variety of perspectives that show the importance of both in understanding turn-of-the-century Mexican society. Discourses on virile citizenship take on new meaning when juxtaposed—as they were in the period—against the perceived effeminacy of the Porfirian regime, as distilled in the transvestite, the *afeminado*, and the flashy dandy. Moreover, the genesis of the ideas that would orient post-revolutionary debates on citizenship and nation are

clearly visible, particularly as the arguments levied against male effeminacy and decadence in the nineteenth century were turned on Porfirian modernity and its inequalities. The emergence of virility cults related to the Revolution and hostility to homosexuals in the 1920s and beyond, therefore, should be read through the prism this period, one marked by the failure of the Porfirian regime to fully incorporate virile citizenship into a modernity in which ambiguity and mutability reigned, rather than solid binaries. While certainly not the only cause of the Revolution, the association of homosexuality and male effeminacy to Porfirian modernity should not be discounted as a driver of change, as critiques of society took on significant meanings that invoked the specter of failed civilizations and racial degeneration. In this way, the reaction to the 41, the 12, and other groups of *afeminados* should be seen as opening salvos in the Revolution itself, as well as in the decades-long struggle to define the relationship between citizenship and homosexuality that followed.

After 1901, *afeminados* continued holding their “reprises” of the Famous 41 in the years following the scandal, undeterred, it appears, by either the rebukes levied in the press or police action. This should be read as a sign of resistance to an increasingly homophobic society, as much as it can be read in other ways. What it meant to be homosexual was emerging, driven both by societal discourse and practices like the roundups, as well as the *afeminado*’s own cultural practices, from transvestism to emulation of famous starlets. Within this emerging awareness were embers of resistance on other fronts, such as the legal challenge levied by the two men in 1912. While this experience should not be generalized as the norm, it was discussed in the public sphere and most likely was known to friends and family of the men in question. The event—like the publication of what homosexuals did and how they could be recognized—provided an archive then and now for those curious about fin-de-siècle Mexican homosexuality. In the next

section, both lines of inquiry that drove this chapter—on the discourses of virile citizenship and fears of foreign influence and on the emerging homosexual social world—reappear and trace how debates on citizenship intensified as homosexuals emerged publicly and inhabited self-aware communities and identities that challenged normative prescriptions made by the post-revolutionary regime.

Section II Introduction: Homosexuality and Society in Mexico, 1920-1940

Francisco Sánchez captivated Elías Nandino when the latter saw him in the Mexico City YMCA pool in the early 1920s. “As he was young, tall, strong and—according to what could be seen through his bathing suit—well endowed, I liked him,” recalled Nandino.¹ In the showers, Nandino chatted Sánchez up and surveyed his slim, athletic body. Sánchez reciprocated amiably; afterwards, they left together, and Nandino offered him a Marlboro cigarette and then invited him to an ice-cream parlor, where Nandino, taking note that Sánchez liked his cigarette, gifted him more.² Over time, the two became friends, then lovers, using the “Uai” as a meeting place, then going out on the town afterwards and, eventually, to Nandino’s studio for passionate sex.³

Like many Mexicans after the Revolution, Nandino moved to the capital in 1921 seeking new opportunities and an urban life.⁴ There, he enrolled in medical school, and, as an aspiring poet, became involved with the literary and artistic group known as the Contemporáneos. At a time that many political and cultural authorities sought to promote a nationalist vision, the Contemporáneos, who were one of Mexico’s most important cultural movements, embraced transnational human “universals.” For this, they were considered anti-nationalist, anti-patriotic, and as this section will show, unmanly.⁵ Many of the participants in that group—notably Salvador Novo and Xavier Villarrutia—were homosexual men with whom he became friends.

¹ Enrique Aguilar, *Elías Nandino: una vida no/velada*, 2nd ed. (Mexico, D.F.: Oceano, 2000), 91.

² Elías Nandino, *Juntando mis pasos* (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Aldus, 2000), 129.; Aguilar, *Elías Nandino*, 92.

³ “Uai” was how Mexicans called the YMCA, and it is pronounced the same as “Y”, the nickname of the organization in the United States.

⁴ Gerardo Bustamante Bermúdez, “Cuando hablas nace la poesía...Las entrevistas a Elías Nandino de 1954 a 1993,” in *De dolores y placeres: entrevistas con Elías Nandino entre 1954 y 1993*, ed. Gerardo Bustamante Bermúdez (Mexico, D.F.: Secretaría de Cultura del Gobierno del Distrito Federal, 2009), 9. Nandino was 21 when he moved.

⁵ Nevertheless, this group would fill the echelons of various ministries—notably Education and Foreign Affairs—in more than one administration during the 1920s and 1930s, leaving their indelible mark on both the culture and the institutions in which they served. A few notable works on them include Guillermo Sheridan, *Los Contemporáneos ayer*, 1st ed. (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1985); Salvador A Oropesa, *The Contemporáneos Group: Rewriting Mexico in the Thirties and Forties*, 1st ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003); Rosa García Gutiérrez, *Contemporáneos: La otra novela de la Revolución Mexicana* (Huelva, España: Universidad de Huelva,

Yet, Nandino also sought out the other queer social spheres found in the capital's vibrant cruising cultures that flourished in the Alameda Central, along busy streets, in gymnasiums, and in the Balderas YMCA. Nandino straddled multiple queer worlds and represented himself not as an *afeminado*, but as a masculine-identified man who sought emotional and sexual satisfaction with other athletic "real men", as well as friendships with men who were more discrete than flamboyant. He thus exhibited an emerging identity distinct from that of the *afeminados* of previous decades who based their own identities in part on performances of femininity and emulation of famous female stars. Nandino's identity, in contrast, incorporated physical culture—and reveled in the beauty of the unequivocally masculine body form—as well as certain aspects of the dominant culture that privileged ideas of "authentic" masculinity as desirable in a companion, whether for a temporary tryst or a longer-term relationship.⁶ He lived—and saw himself—as a productive, useful member of society, a belief that would be challenged by others who sought to define any homosexuality as something antithetical to virile Mexican citizenship.

Nandino's identity was a product of the "erotic revolution" that accompanied the military, political, social, and cultural upheavals launched by the Mexican Revolution. This revolution operated on at least three levels: on an emancipatory, liberatory level for individuals like Nandino, on a discursive level that injected gender and sexuality directly into debates about the nation, and within a larger transnational economic, ideological, and cultural framework. New identities and new ideologies about sexuality—that blended cultural norms, political imperatives, and scientific research—would emerge as part of this erotic revolution, which itself occurred at the convergences of the body and identities at local, national, and transnational levels.

1999); Victor Díaz Arciniega, *Querella por la cultura "revolucionaria" (1925)* (Mexico, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1989). Not all, however, were homosexual, even as most were labeled as such.

⁶ His preference for youthful companions, however, linked him to similar preferences expressed by men within the *ambiente*, who had for decades invited young males to be part of the *ambiente*.

Nandino's identity intersected with an emerging masculinity cult that enshrined virility, proletarian industry, and populism as key components of Mexican citizenship.⁷ It was not, however, unambiguously allied with this cult, particularly as it shifted the homosocial admiration of virility, which was key to the cult's success, to homoerotic pleasure. It was, then, an identity straddling multiple worlds, at once in service of national aims and queering those aims, a contested identity, and one that wove the *ambiente* into the public sphere and the post-revolutionary nation, rather than existing separate to it or mainstream society.

In broad strokes, the social and cultural changes spawned during Revolution's military phase (1910-1921) continued into the 1920s and 1930s. Chief among these were pronounced shifts in gender norms, which became most noticeable in the emergence of the *pelonas*, who were the "modern girls," and the public homosexual—exemplified by the Contemporáneos—most commonly found in the arts, among the intelligentsia, and in government positions.⁸ These shifts had political consequences. As Jocelyn Olcott has argued persuasively, Mexicans began to experience revolutionary citizenship as "contingent, inhabited, and gendered," and that the practice of citizenship "depended on specific historical and political contexts, which had local and regional characteristics as well as national and transnational ones."⁹ The debates on citizenship that would dominate the post-revolutionary period "served as a battleground amid rapidly destabilizing gender ideologies." This was particularly true as women emerged more fully in the public sphere, homosexuals became visible participants in post-revolutionary society, and gender became "unfixed," insofar as it was contested in overlapping ways between sectors

⁷ This cult of masculinity, as described in Chapter 3, depended on the physical culture initiated by sporting clubs and the YMCA in previous decades for both national and international legitimacy.

⁸ On the *pelonas*, see Joanne Herschfield, *Imagining la Chica Moderna: Women, Nation, and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1917-1936* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008).; and Anne Rubenstein, "The War on Las Pelonas: Modern Women and Their Enemies, Mexico City, 1924," in *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico*, ed. Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Gabriela Cano (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 57-80.

⁹ Jocelyn Olcott, *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 6.

promoting traditional norms on one hand and the modern girls, *afeminados*, and even transgendered individuals on the other.¹⁰ As gender and sexual norms shifted, new social, cultural, and political groups asserted their status as revolutionary citizens, exercising citizenship—one might say “dissident citizenship”—in a variety of ways, including as this text argues, through identities and practices in which homosexuality played a significant role.

The erotic revolution was aided by the burgeoning internal migration to urban centers.¹¹ By 1930, 8.8 percent of Mexicans lived in the cities of Mexico City, Guadalajara, Monterrey, and Puebla; only 3.3 percent had been in the capital and Guadalajara in 1900.¹² Part of the reason that the cities became destinations for workers was that post-war reconstruction period entailed significant increases in industrialization and economic development, spurred on by a “new breed of technocrats” seeking an “activist, autonomous state capable of directing economic development toward both growth and collective welfare” and emerging industrialists in major cities like Guadalajara, Monterrey, and the capital. Even more importantly, labor unions flexed their new muscles after the Revolution, and many incorporated populism in their political base.¹³

Concurrently, efforts were made to incorporate the disparate regions and peoples of the country—the so-called “many Mexicos”—more fully into the national sphere. This was achieved

¹⁰ See for example the insights in Mary Kay Vaughan, “Pancho Villa, the Daughters of Mary, and the Modern Woman: Gender in the Long Mexican Revolution,” in *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico*, ed. Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Gabriela Cano (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 21-34.; Carlos Monsiváis, “Los iguales, los semejantes, los (hasta hace un minuto) perfectos desconocidos (A cien años de la Redada de los 41),” *Debate Feminista* 12, no. 24 (October 2001): 301-327.; Carlos Monsiváis, “Los gays en México: la fundación, la ampliación, la consolidación del gueto,” *Debate Feminista* 13, no. 26, *Sexo y Violencia* (October 2002): 89-115.; and Gabriela Cano, “Unconcealable Realities of Desire: Amelio Robles's (Transgender) Masculinity in the Mexican Revolution,” in *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico*, ed. Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Gabriela Cano (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 35-56.

¹¹ Immigration headed to new agricultural areas and industrial areas as well.

¹² See James R. Scobie, “The Growth of Latin American Cities, 1870-1930,” in *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, ed. Leslie Bethell, vol. 1870 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 240. Growth, albeit at a lesser rate, was also seen in smaller cities and towns during the period.

¹³ Susan M. Gauss, *Made in Mexico: Regions, Nation, and the State in the Rise of Mexican Industrialism, 1920s-1940s* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 8.

in part through secular, state-run education programs.¹⁴ Mass literacy campaigns and copious periodical articles extended the debates on gender and sexual norms to a wider audience; in addition, more and more Mexicans could engage these debates through *historietas* (comic books) and *fotonovelas* (photo essays) with short captions printed in popular tabloids.¹⁵

Transnational consumption circuits also amplified this opening. As new products became available, more and more Mexicans were drawn into webs of consumption centered on transnational companies. Consumption also created new forms of being; while many products were aimed at the domestic sphere, “consumer culture was above all one of public spectatorship.” This culture was “built around the enjoyment of cheap pleasures found in new urban spaces—department stores, parks, dance halls and theaters, photography and radio studios, post offices, trams, and spacious boulevards.”¹⁶ Of particular interest for this section were the products aimed at “building” or “restoring” the male body, such as athletic goods, clothing, and health products that promised to make men body hale, handsome, and hearty. These qualities had a special relevance in a nation with over one million war dead. They were also qualities required by post-revolutionary national development and the emerging industrial economy, and they became integral to mutually constitutive forms of ideal citizenship and masculine identity as epitomized by the “new man.” In contrast, homosexuality, considered at once an undesirable

¹⁴ The idea of many Mexicos was made famous in Lesley Bird Simpson, *Many Mexicos* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966.) On education as a force for shaping the nation in the post-Revolutionary period, see Mary Kay Vaughan, *The State, Education, and Social Class in Mexico, 1880-1928* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1982). See also Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1997). For an excellent evaluation of the aims of such secular education and the Catholic reaction, see especially chapter 3 of Matthew Butler, *Popular Piety and Political Identity in Mexico's Cristero Rebellion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁵ Anne Rubenstein, *Bad Language, Naked Ladies, and Other Threats to the Nation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Armando Bartra, “The Seduction of the Innocents: The First Tumultuous Moments of Mass Literacy in Postrevolutionary Mexico,” in *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994).

¹⁶ Vaughan, “Pancho Villa, the Daughters of Mary, and the Modern Woman,” 24.

product of the social environment or a bodily malfunction, became an even more important foil against which the “healthy,” virile citizen was juxtaposed.

Thus, between 1920-1940, more rigid sex/gender binaries—such as male/female, hetero/homosexual—were increasingly asserted as normative in large part as a reaction to the new sex/gender possibilities unleashed by the Revolution.¹⁷ These binaries were deployed to service emergent forms of post-revolutionary national identity, citizenship, sex/gender norms, and culture that affirmed and solidified the hold middle-class sectors had on Mexican society after 1921. They also serviced visions of the ideal Mexican as a productive proletarian or as a hard-working, newly educated indigenous peasant.

In other words, modern development in Mexico incorporated at its core several anti-modern tropes that sought to restrict the “excesses” that modernity was perceived to permit. These excesses—particularly those related to gender, sexuality, and the upending of norms—threatened the transition from one patriarchal oligarchy (the Porfiriato) to another dominated by veterans of the Revolution and the emerging alliance between the revolutionary middle-class and proletarian organizations. It is no coincidence that during the twenty-year period between the end of the Revolution’s primary military phase and the conclusion of Lázaro Cárdenas’s *sexenio*, some of the most heated debates on Mexican identity and the organization of the society—from the family home to the body politic—centered on issues of gender and sexuality. These included debates on sexual education, on “virile” literature and citizenship, on the proper way to raise boys so as not to “create” *afeminados* but good citizens instead, and on the role of government in education, the protection of the public, and the reform of criminals.¹⁸ Who was included and

¹⁷ See the excellent example in Rubenstein, “The War on Las Pelonas.”

¹⁸ The debates over “virile” literature are engaged by a number of scholars. See, for example, Oropesa, *The Contemporáneos Group*; Robert McKee Irwin, *Mexican Masculinities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Guillermo Sheridan, *Los Contemporáneos Ayer*, Vida y pensamiento de México (México: Fondo de

excluded from the norm in this period—a new normal that was being consciously fashioned by a variety of cultural and political actors—would shape Mexican society for the rest of the century. Importantly, the dividing line between normal and abnormal, between citizen and non-citizen remained unstable and contested; in other words, despite attempts to solidify it, it remained unfixed, thereby allowing space for challenges on quotidian, political, and cultural levels.

Despite the significant social and political tensions in the period—this was the height of anti-clericalism in Mexico, a time of more than one rebellion against the new state, and a moment when the socio-political causes of the Revolution remained unsolved—even ideological opponents, most notably the Cristeros and the left-leaning post-Revolutionary administrations, agreed on the need to control sexuality due to its threat to youth and the nation's well-being. While they disagreed on how best to educate the populace—or if to do so at all—they both nevertheless condemned homosexuals as anti-Mexican, although some believed they could be reformed socially and spiritually. Both religious and secular thinkers utilized tropes and ideas from a variety of scientific, cultural, and theological sources as each sought to define who was and who was not Mexican. Far from abstract, these debates often spilled into actions, from police roundups of “known” homosexuals as perpetrators of “moral outrages” to the mentoring of mothers on how to produce virile youths.

At the same time, the period between 1920-1940 also marked a dramatic amplification of the homosexual social world, both for homosexuals themselves and for external observers who saw homosexuality's threat increasing. Homosexual men became more visible than ever before, and these men could be found in artistic circles, among Mexico's greatest writers and thinkers, and even in the government itself, a reality that drew the ire of critics from all political and

Cultura Económica, 1985).; García Gutiérrez, *Contemporáneos*.; and Díaz Arciniega, *Querella por la cultura "revolucionaria" (1925)*.

ideological persuasions. Among these homosexual men were the Contemporáneos, many of whom expressed a dandy-esque, *flaneur*-style identity that rejected nationalism for the “universal” and flouted the emerging cult of masculinity with their camp, affect, and, at times, androgyny. Members of the Contemporáneos, such as Novo, Villarrutia, and Manuel Rodríguez Lozano, embraced the post-Revolutionary secularization and modernization, going so far as to participate as government functionaries and to produce artistic works in the service of the state. However, they also rejected the state’s cultural nationalism, looking instead to European literary and artistic traditions and their “universal” relevance and appeal, all the while flouting the cult of masculinity through their campy behavior. Perhaps ironically, this group was responsible for much of what would be come known *as* Mexican, and these men would leave their imprint upon the face of Mexican modernity, forever queering national projects.

While social reformers, criminologists, editorialists, and governmental officials sought new ways of controlling the “sexual problem” and homosexuals—going so far as to exiling homosexuals to the Islas Marias penal colony—they were unsuccessful in removing homosexuals from public life and in destroying the social world of the *ambiente*. The 1920s and 1930s saw exhibitions of the nude male form increase as never before; the emergence of a new nightlife centered around the sexually liminal cantinas, dance parlors, and brothels in urban working-class neighborhoods; and the emergence of new, urban, “modern” types, of which the public homosexual was one of the most notorious. In addition, masculinity—and what constituted an appropriate performance of it—remained contested terrain, with some trappings of the modern—such as the well-fitting suit—being simultaneously marked as foreign, modern, homosexual, and desirable. Even athletic masculinity, a valued component of citizenship, was compromised by the *ambiente* and the participation of homosexual men in it.

Nandino was one such man. His experiences—and those of others like him—point to a multiplicity of homosexual identities in the period, identities that often overlapped with the mainstream world in significant ways. Nandino was a poet and writer, friends with men far more campy than himself, and a lover of young, athletic men. He also was a medical official for the Distrito Federal, a position in which he interacted with men arrested for homosexual activity—and homosexual criminals—in the notorious Lecumberri prison and various police precincts. Through his job, he was thus a part of the very system that sought to “reform” the sexual behaviors that he himself practiced; his success in keeping the job, identifying himself as another form of homosexual man, and weaving through these multiple worlds demonstrates how queer identities were not simply formed in opposition to the status quo, but could also be complicit in it. In other words, Nandino’s experiences—both positive and negative—as someone inhabiting overlapping queer spheres was representative of the opportunities available for homosexual men who could sufficiently “pass” as normal, while those who could not—or would not—on the basis of their gender identity, class, or race faced significant challenges.

This section, comprised of three chapters, shows how homosexuals and homosexuality were carriers of meaning in debates on citizenship and the nation, in the development of the modern Mexican city, and in the deployment of state power against individuals and groups it deemed to dangerous or abnormal to be included within the nation in the post-revolutionary period. A wide variety of sources—archival documents, personal letters, periodical articles, sexology and criminology texts, court case files, advice columns, and photographs—support the importance of homosexuals and understandings of homosexuality to the period. Chapter 3 focuses on the debates on homosexuality in the contexts of citizenship, sexology/criminology, youth raising and reform, and politics. Chapter 4 provides illuminates the homosexual social

world and its resistance to and participation the processes detailed in Chapter 3. Finally, Chapter 5 is a case study of the Islas Mariás penal colony, a site where the convergence of state power, homosexual communities, and ideas of what it meant to be a Mexican citizen—and to be a “universal” human—converged. Homosexual men’s visibility, already pronounced since 1901,

The visibility of queer men—already pronounced since 1901—increased dramatically during the period, particularly in the 1930s. Such visibility stoked concerns about queerness that, while already present for decades, increasingly permeated politics, discourses on revolutionary literature and cultural identity, medical and criminological practices, and educational debates. This was in part due to the fact that rather than living in worlds apart, queer men inhabited social and occupational spheres and spaces that overlapped with those of mainstream society. If the Famous 41 scandal was an opening shot of the Revolution, insofar as it marked *afeminados* as representative of all that was wrong with Mexican society, then the period between 1920 and 1940 marked the development of homosexuals as definable types, notorious criminals, cultural arbiters, political actors, and even sympathetic victims. In other words, as individuals that straddled the shifting boundary between who was and who was not included as a citizen and who moved between local, national, and transnational circuits of culture and meaning.

Chapter 3: Virile Citizenship, Dissident Sexualities, and Homosexual “Types,” 1920-1940

In August 1924, a cultural and commercial delegation from Italy arrived in Mexico City. Sent at the behest of King Victor Emmanuel III and Benito Mussolini and received by Mexican president Álvaro Obregón, the group was embraced by the Mexican establishment, with numerous reports and photos of events published in newspaper *Excelsior*.¹⁹ However, leftist newspaper *El Machete* decried the delegation’s arrival as representing nothing more than fascist propaganda and the repression and violation of workers’ and peasants’ rights.²⁰ In addition, among the delegation’s members were “*jotitos*,” i.e., little *jotos* or foppish fags. Mexican artist José Clemente Orozco seized upon these *jotitos* and lampooned the group in an image that appeared in the newspaper. In the image, *all* of the delegates are portrayed as *jotos*; they are dressed in slim suits, small hats or boaters, and heeled shoes. Most have flamboyant hair and mustaches. These were tropes all commonly associated with the dandies—*pollos*, *señoritos*, *fifis*—since the turn of the century, and they were markers of male effeminacy, particularly as viewed through the masculine norms of the working and lower-middle classes and some in the revolutionary intelligentsia that embraced those norms politically.²¹

What made the men *jotitos* and not simply dandies was the prominence of the men’s asses, a clear sign of homosexuality in the period. One man even was cupping his counterpart’s butt cheek, which in Orozco’s *oeuvre* and common parlance was a sign of sexual interest,

¹⁹ See for example “Lo que encierra la nave “Italia” que va a llegar,” *Excelsior*, August 12, 1924, sec. 2, 1; “Recibio ayer el Sr. Presidente Obregón las credenciales del excmo. Embajador Giuriati,” *Excelsior*, August 27, 1924, sec. 2, 1; and the photo essay in *Excelsior*, August 31, 1924.

²⁰ *El Machete* was as the organ of the Sindicato de Obreros, Técnicos, Pintores, y Escultores (Workers, Technicians, Painters, and Sculptors Syndicate).

²¹ See *El Machete*, August 28-September 4, 1924. Cited in José Clemente Orozco, “*Sainete, drama y barbarie*”: *Centenario, 1883-1983* (Mexico, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1983), 58, 84. Robert Buffington traces the development of how working-class penny presses used homophobic understandings of masculinity to ridicule and critique the middle-class and elite sectors of Mexican society and politics. See Rob Buffington, “Homophobia and the Mexican Working Class, 1900-1910,” in *The Famous 41: Sexuality and Social Control in Mexico, 1901*, ed. Robert McKee Irwin, Edward J. McCaughan, and Michelle Rocio Nasser (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 193-226.

whether hetero- or homosexual. The men were also shown with affected poses: bent or crossed legs, limp wrists, and or hands behind their heads in a coquettish gesture. Above them hung the moon and stars—thus referencing the *jotos*’ preference for nightlife—as well as an arrow pointing upwards and to the right—the male symbol—with two hearts pierced by the arrow, a reference to same-sex love. Together, these images left little ambiguity as to the men’s nature or their stark contrast to the proletariat and activist middle-classes that *El Machete* served.

Orozco’s cartoon did not emerge in a vacuum; rather, it reflected the perspectives of many in Mexican society towards queer men, how they could be recognized, and where (and at what time) they might be found. It also, along with the article, simultaneously juxtaposed local concerns—the anti-fascist, pro-worker stance of the Left—with what was represented as the bourgeois, sexual excess of the homosexual fops. While portraying the Italian delegation in a manner recognizable to a Mexican audience as homosexual, it simultaneously shifted queerness into the domain of the foreign, thereby asserting through negation a nationalist, masculinist vision that multiply condemned the Italians as foreign, fascists, and fags.²² The tension between being able to recognize homosexuality through common tropes—which implied that homosexuals were a part, however undesirable of Mexican society, given the legacy of the 41—and seeking to associate it as something anti-Mexican and foreign was not new. Yet, it was during the 1920s and 1930s that the tenor of debates on citizenship became increasingly inflected with rhetoric that incorporated gender and sexuality as arbiters of normalcy. Indeed, the public debates on “virile literature” and sexual education—among others on prostitution, women’s voting, and eugenics in the period—demonstrate that this was not an academic question, but rather one linked to understandings of what *lo mexicano* was and was to be, how masculinity

²² It may have also reflected a prejudice against Italians and/or Southern Europeans in an age that regarded Northwest Europe as the height of civilization.

could be recognized, and how citizenship and honor required a certain set of sex/gender norms to function appropriately. The Italians, obviously, were not apt models, nor were Mexican *jotos* who by implication were condemned as foreign, anti-worker, and fascist in *El Machete*.

Orozco's image also carried valence in part due to the visibility that *afeminados*, *jotos*, *invertidos*, and other homosexuals had obtained by the early 1920s. Homosexuals were becoming a recognizable type, although Orozco's caricature represented but one vision of homosexual identity, even if it was that most widely known to mainstream society. It is not surprising, then, that a critique of the Italian delegation's politics and aims would include such a vociferous, mocking caricature. Queer men, who had once been signs of the Porfiriato's decadence, were becoming even more visible; as avatars of foreign-ness, bourgeois taste, and conspicuous consumption, they were thus the enemies of socialist, nationalist goals. For some sectors of society—such as those represented by *El Machete*—who saw power still in the hands of those they despised, homosexual men became emblems of what still needed to be corrected in society and how the Revolution was not yet finished. To such sectors, the prominent role that homosexuals played in shaping the post-Revolutionary state was an anathema to what the Revolution stood for and a threat to individual health, the body politic, and the nation's future.

Orozco's image illustrated that underlying class antagonisms had not disappeared following the Revolution. The image of the Italian delegation—which linked foreign tastes with effeminacy, homosexuality, and the dandy—appeared precisely at the same time that ads selling elegance to the upper classes appeared in rival publications, including *Excelsior*. Such elegance—expressed in hats and suits like those found at the High Life store on Madero Street—was often foreign in origin. Thus, the critique of the delegation was also one of local realities and the continuing influence of foreign culture, with the homosexual dandy its most visible emblem.

This chapter uses Orozco's image as a starting point to explore both the discourses and debates that circulated on homosexuality in politics, art, criminology, and medicine. It explores what happened when Mexican society attempted to restructure itself from a war-footing between competing factions to a more unified nation-state, the ways in which discourses on homosexuality mattered in its formation, and how the homosexual emerged as an even more useful foil for defining *lo mexicano*. During the 1920s and 1930s the Mexican state, although not as powerful as it would become in later decades, nevertheless attempted to extend its influence over "morality" and to use its resources and capacities to control sexual behavior, to direct moral education for youths, and to bring the bodies of its citizens more fully into its purview through medical jurisprudence. This approach mirrored its engagement with the "problem" of Native Americans (and, at times, rural areas) with regards to national development. Both "problems" built upon ideas already circulating in during the Porfiriato, but the post-revolutionary state took a more active role in trying to effect the sort of citizen-subjects it required.

At its core, this chapter illuminates the tensions between interests in individual virility and that which would support the post-revolutionary corporatist development model, between individualism and revolutionary citizenry—particularly as applied to men who did not fit the virile norm—and between aspirations for a strong nation and the universal/transnational. At the same time that critics would label homosexual men as anti-Mexican, anti-national cowards—as well as dangerous, infective social others—they also sought to include Mexico's national formation as part of universal modernity, to have "just enough" Mexicanness to be distinct, while deploying "universals," such as found in new science, as the grounds for exclusion. The irony is that the group most associated with the universal—the Contemporáneos—was comprised of homosexuals and rejected precisely on the grounds that it was not national enough. Even more,

through the period, an ambivalence to the foreign would cede ground to fears of the foreign. Such fears were linked to ideas of contamination and desires for national self-determination. Yet, again, the irony remains that these twin discourses of the post-revolutionary period—the gendered transition (or restoration) of the nation into a prosperous maturity and the simultaneous need for and rejection of the foreign (couched in terms of the homosexual other)—also entailed a constant negotiation between the national and the universal that threatened the erasure of *mexicanidad*. We need homosexuals, their histories, and the histories of homosexuality because they form the most important prism through this post-revolutionary story is amplified.

The first sections of the chapter examine the debates on virile citizenship circulating in Mexico during the period in political and sexological/criminological terms. Next, it describes the ways in which the state enforced ideas of masculine citizenship on men and especially youths, who were viewed as future citizens who could be redeemed with proper education. Together, these sections offer a panorama of the period and demonstrates how masculinity was a contested terrain in the aftermath of the Revolution, how *lo mexicano* and citizenship based upon it were fashioned rather than “authentically” already given, and how Mexican modernity and revolution incorporated distinctly anti-modern and anti-revolutionary traits (particularly in relation to sex/gender norms). Stereotypes of homosexuality were necessary to the post-Revolutionary formation of national unity ideologies—whether emanating from the Left or Right—because they provided an “other” that was believed to have no legitimate claim on Mexican citizenship, given that this citizenship was defined with virile traits no homosexual was thought to possess. Predictably, the homosexual as an anti-Mexican, foreign, useless, and effeminate other became even more a significant part of defining *lo mexicano*, thereby making that which many in the

1920s and 1930s saw as marginal or even dangerous, an integral component of the new post-revolutionary order.

I. Only the Eunuchs Are Against Us: Revolutionary Masculinity, Citizen Virility, Homosexuality, and the Nation, 1920-1940

In the aftermath of the Revolution, a public and very heated debate began on the need for “virility” in Mexican politics, literature, arts, and society. For many Mexicans, particularly those who identified with ideologies of social elevation and proletarian struggle, the post-revolutionary “new man” was necessarily a patriotic, hard-working, “useful,” and virile individual. At the behest of José Vasconcelos, then Secretary of Education (1921-1924), muralists like Diego Rivera, José Orozco, and David Siqueiros covered buildings with social realist art, depicting nationalist subject matter, Mexico’s previous indigenous civilizations, daily life, ideological figures like Marx who agitated for proletarian struggle, and historical scenes ultimately showing the triumph of Mexican heroes over their adversaries. Vasconcelos and the muralists intended their art to serve a pedagogical purpose; found on the interiors of important public buildings, anyone could learn from them, regardless of social class or race. Behind this process was Vasconcelos’s *indigenismo* and philosophies on race, which were made famous in his *La raza cósmica* (The Cosmic Race) in 1925, a treatise that called for the creation of a “fifth race” blending the other races of the world together.²³

The post-revolutionary period became one in which various Mexican states and politics experimented with new political, economic, and cultural projects, vying for the title of “Laboratory of the Revolution.” Tomás Garrido Canabal, governor of Tabasco (1922-1935) was

²³ Such beliefs were ultimately themselves racist, offering little social advancement for contemporary indigenous people while also extolling the virtues of an imagined indigenous past as part of the national project and recognizing racial stereotypes that devalued people of color. For a clear example of *indigenismo*-style writing that valorized the indigenous past, see Carlos Pellicer’s poem “Oda a Cuauhtemoc” (1924). An English translation can be found in Gilbert M. Joseph and Timothy J. Henderson, *The Mexico Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 405-410.

one of the most radical leaders, and his vision of the “new man” was an “abstemious and atheistic ‘man of the future’.” To form him, Canabal’s government instituted new education programs, among which were the “Socialist ABCs” (1929), a series of treatises urging students to think of themselves as part of a social whole, rather than “egoists” who wanted to control land and money for their own benefit, rather than that of society.

One section, entitled “Little Proletarian” asserted that (male) youths were already important to the new society:

I call you this because I know that your father is a proletarian, and you will be one also. You lack much, and you and your family work hard for your food. Although you are still young, you have already begun watering the soil with the sweat of your brow, and your hands are growing coarse from using heavy tools. It is good that this is so: although small you are already manly, because as a child you still enjoy the feeling of being useful. To be useful is to be good for something, to do something, to give something, and it is the noblest aspiration one can have in life. To be useful is to be happy.²⁴

The primer thus combined understandings of class struggle with gender norms: a proletarian was one who worked hard, who was useful to society, and whose body reflected the hard work (in the coarse hands and implied muscles from lifting heavy tools) that it undertook in society’s service. Youths, who were future “new men,” needed to be educated properly so as to be able to undertake this role and to become virile. This would be a recurring theme in the period, including in the ways that youths were educated and reformed, as well as the ways parents, particularly mothers, were instructed to raise their children.

As part of building strong future citizens, the Mexican government supported the expansion of physical culture in schools. In addition, a new journal, *Educación Física*, appeared in February 1923. On the journal’s inaugural cover, the male body was immediately linked to *indigenismo* and the nation, as the classic image of discus thrower was modified for the Mexican

²⁴ Anonymous, “The Socialist ABC’s,” in *The Mexico Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph and Timothy J. Henderson, trans. Timothy J. Henderson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 412.

context. The man, fully nude and rippling with muscles, carried the Mexica (Aztec) Sun Stone, a symbol that was popularized as reflecting Mexican cultural identity. The journal included articles on teaching methods, as well as photographs of athletic men who were doing their part on developing the body and nation together. In the popular press, increasing sports coverage also extolled the virtues of the developed, masculine body.²⁵ An athletic event scheduled for August 17, 1924 promised awards for first, second, and third places, with the awards “pinned on [men’s] developed chests by beautiful girls that had been invited in advance to preside over the party.” In other words, the masculine body was something to display in its glory and the recognition given to its development reaffirmed heteronormativity through the awarding of medals by the beauties.²⁶

Simultaneously, Mexico was inundated with new products that played on both local and national ideas of the male body, as well as transnational circuits of meaning in which the male body was understood as an important site of citizenship and national health. Speaking directly to athletes, an ad for Mentholatum in August 1924 promised to restore the body from “all the afflictions of athletes,” including sore muscles, contusions, and fatigue.²⁷ The venerable department store El Palacio de Hierro got in on the act, offering customers sporting equipment for boxing and baseball, which could help cultivate virility and lead to “perfect health.”²⁸ Virility was not simply the duty of the young. Older men also were urged and enticed to regain their “youthful vitality,” particularly as it related to sexuality. If heterosexuality was key to the nation and citizenship, then the inability to consummate sexuality impeded both sexual and political

²⁵ One sports page in the August 14, 1924 edition of *Excelsior* shows reports from sporting events in other cities, including Guanajuato and Guadalajara. See page 6 of section 2 in the paper.

²⁶ “Encuentro atletico del club deportivo,” *Excelsior*, August 12, 1924, sec. 2, 6. Interestingly, this same article also applauded young women who were embracing sports and rejecting the mantle of “the weaker sex” that had unfairly been placed upon them, showing that development could also be the duty of women.

²⁷ Ad for Mentholatum in *Excelsior*, August 15, 1924, 7.

²⁸ Ad for El Palacio de Hierro, *Excelsior* August 18, 1924, sec. 2, 8.

function. Thus products were available that could restore one's "youthful vitality" so as not to allow age to prevent one from being useful or to become feminized.²⁹

The irony of viewing the Revolution only through a *machista* lens was that that the struggle also created new opportunities for those who challenged sex/gender norms openly. As Carlos Monsiváis has argued,

If the Mexican Revolution did not allow 'betrayal to the species', it did promote the spaces where the unusual and previously inconceivable (could) live, and in the capital—no longer ruled by the Porfirian regime, nor bound to morals and good manners—there were free women not classed as prostitutes and homosexuals that (could) walk without the fear of being murdered or outraged, as it happened in the provinces.³⁰

Both modern girls and homosexuals became visible examples of the multiple identities—rather than the unitary vision of the (male) proletarian—possible in the post-revolutionary period, and both groups asserted their own relevance as citizens and participants in politics and culture. Indeed, the Revolution had helped to disrupt mental taboos against sexuality in the capital; even as homosexuality itself was still repressed in many respects, it became (and was allowed to become) more visible, to the extent that areas of the city became visible sites of the homosexual social world. In addition, conspicuous consumption of fine goods, from hats to suits, at shops like the High Life or the Regal increased; this challenged the image of the "new man" as one located among the working proletariat by invoking images of modernity, sophistication and progress that appealed to middle-class Mexicans. Those who saw such trappings as markers of social status and social elevation were eager to participate in transnational cultures, rather than solely nationalist projects.³¹ Such desires to look snappy were also dangerously close to the "egoism" and "narcissism" that would be attributed to the bourgeoisie and homosexuals.

²⁹ "Consigna otra vez su vitalidad de joven," *Excelsior*, August 12, 1924, sec. 2, 6.

³⁰ Carlos Monsiváis, *Salvador Novo: Lo marginal en el centro* (Mexico, D.F.: Ediciones Era, 2000), 32.

³¹ See for example the ads in *Excelsior* in August 1924, such as the August 11 ad for the High Life, which extolled the virtues of the "American" suit and the August 13 ad for El Centro Mercantil, which portrayed a man in a suit and bowler hat.

Even more, from the perspectives of the ideologues described above, men who participated in these more visible cultures were incomplete men. Again, images were used to “educate” the public and to mock the men. For example, two images appearing in the “Humorismos” section of the September 15, 1925 edition of *CROM*, the publication of the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana, lampooned such men. In one, two men in suits stand next to a modern looking woman. “If you had to choose between Carlos and I,” Juanito asks, “with whom would you get married?” The woman replies, “with my cousin Manuel.” In another cartoon entitled “El tercer sexo” (The Third Sex), a young man in a suit and smoking a cigarette stands next to a modern girl (easily recognizable due to her hair and clothing). “And you won’t have a row with your husband if he sees us together?” the man asks. “Don’t worry,” the woman responds, “he only gets angry when he sees me with men.”³² The implication is clear: dandies are not “real” men and lack sufficient virility even to challenge heteronormativity.

Another example: in his collection of small drawings entitled “Maneras de hacer el amor” (Ways of Making Love), which appeared in the magazine *L’ ABC* in January 1926, Orozco included among the various types of sexuality one called “*al fresco*.”³³ The image is of two homosexual dandies from behind, their posteriors enlarged and hanging out; both are wearing tight clothing and boater hats, and one has a cane. The men hold hands and are presumably out on the town, given their attire. Captioning the photo *al fresco* was a clever play on words, as *fresco* had been a term used to describe homosexual men for at least two decades by that time. The word also carried the meaning of someone who had a lot of “nerve,” i.e. someone who was

³² “Humorismos,” *Crom*, September 15, 1925, 100.

³³ See “Maneras de hacer el amor,” *L’ ABC*, January 17, 1926. Cited in Orozco, “*Sainete, drama y barbarie*”: *Centenario, 1883-1983*, 76, 85. The images are really quite delightful, and they include a poet struggling painfully to write poetry (*la romántica*); one with a woman and man touching tongues (*la francesa*); two dogs connected by their posteriors (*estilo chorizo*); a policeman chasing a woman (*estilo gendarme*), and a man handing a woman money (*a la moderna*), among others.

shocking, which was an apt description of homosexual dandies in the period for mainstream society. These definitions were beyond the “normal” definition of the term, which was “cool”, “young,” or “fresh,” terms that also applied to the young men as they took their new identities, nerve, and sexuality into public.

Like in the image of the Italian delegation, the men’s asses are their most prominent feature, which marked them as effeminate homosexuals much in the same way prostitutes could be recognized by their large breasts. Such depictions situated homosexual desire as specifically anal desire, thereby affirming penetration, in the minds of presumably non-homosexual men like Orozco, as the defining factor of homosexual identity. Orozco was educating readers on what homosexuals looked like, reinforcing the stereotype and its non-virile “otherness”.

¿Afeminado?

Even films participated in the cultural discussion of what made a man a man, although ironically one that generated much attention originated in the United States. Starting on September 6, 1924, numerous movie theaters screened the silent film *Twenty-one* (1923), starring Richard Barthelmess and Dorothy Mackaill.³⁴ Ads promised moviegoers that they would find drama, comedy, happiness, youth, love, and romance in the film, and that the film was better than other flicks starring Barthelmess.³⁵ Importantly, the film’s title, rather than being translated, was instead renamed *¿Afeminado?* The renaming had to do with the plot of the film, which traced the trajectory of a young man through the trials and tribulations of becoming a “real man.” Indeed, the film’s “name provoke[d] the most varied and heated commentaries” and was mostly likely a

³⁴ The film appeared at the Olimpia, Salón Rojo, Venecia, Rialto, America, María Guerrero, Bucareli, San Rafael, Buen Tono, Díaz de León, Rívoli and Briseño

³⁵ See for example the ad in *El Demócrata*, September 5, 1924, at the top of page 7.

marketing ploy that capitalized on the “worries of the moment in Mexican life;” any curious individual would surely head out to see the “best film of the day.”³⁶

In the film, the lead character Julian McCullough, played by Barthelmess, “grew up among skirts, perfumes, and honey” rather than acquiring the qualities his father wanted to instill in him. Among these were the strength to tackle “the fight for life.” To prepare him, his father had attempted to teach him boxing and sports, as well as how to be hard-working. He wanted to “make of him a man in every sense of the word.” However, his mother disagreed with his father, and since they lived apart, she acquired custody of him, educating him instead in more feminine ways. This new education led him to appear with his eyes, lips, and cheeks painted at social masquerade parties. However, eventually he made himself into a real man—“he fought, fell in love, and gave the first kiss! A hot kiss, like a light, sprouting from his heart, setting fire to his whole being, romantic and tender!”

At the heart of the film was the question of how a man was made through his experiences, the social environment, and his own self-determination. This was the “fight for life” facing all men, a reality that served as the basis for the ad’s claim that the film was one of “truth, not spectacle.” This fight occurred in an uncertain world, one with various feminizing forces that threatened to make men into *afeminados*. Barthelmess’s character fights the ambiguity—expressed in the questions “Who is he?” and “Who will he be?”—posed in one of the ads for the film—that swirled about him. The “truth” that the film highlighted was the perilous status of masculinity and the difficulty in demonstrating “proof” that it had been attained and was being maintained. These questions encapsulated the unease over how men were “made,” a process that would be a frequent subject in the public sphere during the 1920s and 1930s (as well as beyond).

³⁶ “¿Afeminado?...Una película tan original como interesante, cuyo argumento puede ser un problema de la vida de usted,” *El Demócrata*, September 7, 1924. This same blurb appeared in *Excelsior* as well, as did huge ads. The ads *Excelsior*, September 6, 1924, 9 and September 7, 1924, 6.

Indeed, this was a “fight” that Mexican readers, particularly revolutionary men, would have easily recognized. A combination review/advertisement appearing in *El Demócrata* on September 7 asserted that “‘Afeminado?....’ is a film that presents in an intelligent and very interesting manner one of the most serious and transcendental social problems of life: how to make a man a real man.” Indeed, Beyond the technical and aesthetic qualities of the film, ¿*Afeminado?* promised to resonate with the personal experience that the reader himself had. And, “the public, who by intuition knows that it merits their interest, are in great part correct.”³⁷

That the film appeared in 1924 is important; not only were sex/gender norms being challenged and defended—such as through the appearance of *las pelonas*, the rise of a more visible and defiant homosexual intellectual and artistic class, and the expansion of efforts to promote sexual educations among youths—but also the proper way to shape adolescents was being hotly debated so as to shield them from the dangers posed by modernity. What would become of a youth who lived in a broken home? What would happen to boys who were influenced too heavily by their mothers? These were variations on the questions raised by the ad that would figure in social workers’ evaluations of youths in the Tribunal de Menores and that would appear in advice columns to mothers on how to produce virile future citizens.

The significance of Barthelmess’s character for a Mexican public primed by images and texts asserting the links between effeminacy and homosexuality should not be underestimated, as effeminate behaviors such as wearing make-up could mark a descent into homosexuality or could be seen as actual signs thereof. Indeed, the film, its translated title (which evoked the image of *afeminados* who had been arrested), and the description provided of it in the Mexican press, referenced emerging understandings of the influence that the social environment—particularly that of the family and the relationship of male youths to mothers—played in shaping

³⁷ Ibid.

youths. It also foreshadowed ideas of a male's development being constantly threatened by hereditary or endocrinological abnormalities, ideas that would become increasingly visible in the public sphere within the period. These ideas, as Anne Fausto-Sterling has asserted, contained a prominent contradiction: femaleness was simultaneously understood as something passive and weak, as well as an "active" force threatening the proper acquisition of masculinity.³⁸

Perspectives on homosexuality mirrored this contradiction, at once asserting the frailty of homosexuals vis-à-vis "real men," while also describing the dangers that homosexuals posed for society, particularly male youths, by threatening development in the individual and nation.

Pure Art: Pure Maricones

If any year in the two decades between the end of the Revolution served as the most contentious in terms of the public debate on virility and homosexuality, it was 1934. This is not surprising given that it came in the midst of significant public debate on sexual education and it was also a presidential election year and the start of Lázaro Cárdenas's *sexenio*. Indeed, after years of political domination by Plutarco Elías Calles, first as president and then as Jefe Supremo during the Maximato, many societal actors saw an opportunity to shape what Mexico would become with the new election. One of the first salvos that year was fired by painter Diego Rivera, who in "Arte Puro: Puros Maricones" asserted that the history of art was tied to that of class struggle between the "combatants in the proletarian ranks" and the "servants of capitalism."³⁹ Rhetorics of strength and social/national progress figured into his article:

All workers in the plastic arts who do not want to live and produce as lackeys of the bourgeoisie, making weak and ugly works, must, because they have no other path to follow, support the progressive social forces, integrating themselves into them, putting

³⁸ See Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

³⁹ Diego Rivera, "Arte Puro: Puros Maricones," in *Obras, tomo II: Textos polémicos, 1921-1949*, ed. Xavier Moyssén Echeverría et al. (Mexico: El Colegio Nacional, 1999), 83. Rivera's piece originally appeared in *Choque: Órgano de la alianza de Trabajadores de las Artes Plásticas*, no. 1, March 27, 1934.

themselves in position to create ascendant and strong works, as a consequence, of a high aesthetic quality, that is to say, essentially useful.⁴⁰

In contrast, “pure art” was a “stupid, sentimental thing of the capitalist class in power in order to control aesthetic production and to deflect every expression that can be useful to the exploited and oppressed classes.” “Pure art” instead was “hypocritical and dirty,” “anti-hygienic,” “tasteless garbage,” “old-fashioned,” a legacy of “pathological” religious beliefs, and a child of bourgeois capitalism. Those who practiced it were nothing more than “exploiters of vice...that live off the degeneration of the rich and off the misery and malnutrition of the oppressed poor, administering intoxicating and anesthetic products.”⁴¹

Rivera situated “pure art” with the politics of Franco, Hitler, and Mussolini, as well as the works of French Poet Rimbaud. The painter made it clear who among Mexican society were part of the pathology of pure art: an “incipient group of pseudo-plastic artists and bourgeois writers who, calling themselves pure poets, are nothing in reality but pure *maricones*.” Building on the social, moral, and hygiene campaigns initiated in the period, Rivera asserted that it was “urgent” to liquidate such art for the sake of Mexican society, and while it would be difficult to defeat, the Alianza de Trabajadores de las Artes Plásticas would be at the vanguard of crushing it. Perhaps one of the first steps was through Rivera’s own lampooning of the Contemporáneos in the murals found in the Secretaría de Educación (SEP) building.

Rivera’s tirade was picked up a month later by foreign observer Tristán Marof (penname of Bolivian intellectual Gustavo Navarro), who shared the painter’s perspectives on pure art and who at times collaborated with him on his writing. Marof had just finished his four-year study entitled *Mexico de frente y de perfil*. Along with analyses of Mexican politics, culture, and revolutionary legacies, Navarro turned his attention to the Mexican intelligentsia. Marof, unlike

⁴⁰ Ibid., 84.

⁴¹ Ibid., 84-86.

Rivera, singled out the Contemporáneos for special criticism by name in his “Literatos afeminados” section, calling out the young writers as a “strange group” of disingenuous and “morbid tendencies” who were self-indulgent and desired “art for art’s sake.” “None of them have moved from Mexico, but they adore a corrupt and sadistic Paris,” their brains had been “damaged” by the contamination of decadent French writers, and they were “disciples” of Gide and Freud.⁴² Marof continued by claiming that men like Novo, Villaurrutia, and Genaro Estrada (who was a writer, diplomat, and professor) were “sad and colorless bureaucrats who carry out inferior services in the Mexican administration.” Thus, not only did they write literature of no value, they also did not well serve the Mexican public. In fact, their work generated no interest outside of Mexico, according to Marof, and in Mexico “reactionary” publications printed it.⁴³

Marof echoed Rivera’s claims about the Contemporáneos’s lack of masculinity, asserting that they were “narcissistic”—which had been long seen as a characteristic of homosexuals—and “skittish before the smallest virile gesture.”⁴⁴ Such claims also referenced those made by the Stridentists a decade earlier, such as when Germán List Arzubide in 1926 had claimed the men had to “prove” their masculinity before the police, having been found in the Alameda, a known homosexual cruising site.⁴⁵ These claims, which linked effeminacy and homosexuality, were crucial to positing homosexuals as anti-social, anti-national enemies of the proletariat. They also suggested that the Revolution would not truly succeed without the “liquidation” of those who produced art or literature that was “pure” rather than “useful.”

The ridicule might have ended there had it not been for a scandal reported in October 1934 in tabloid magazine *Detectives*. The magazine interviewed a police detective who described

⁴² Tristan Marof, *México De Frente Y De Perfil*, Colección Claridad (Buenos Aires: Claridad, 1934), 123.

⁴³ Ibid., 124-126.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 126.

⁴⁵ Germán List Arzubide, *El Movimiento Estridentista* (Jalapa, Veracruz: Ediciones de Horizonte, 1927), 47.

his experience apprehending homosexual men, particularly those dressed in drag. However, the particular scandal included individuals who, while not specifically named, were “well known” in the literary world who were among those that had “reneged” on being men.⁴⁶ Most likely spurred on by this scandal, the final homophobic salvo, one that linked the concerns over homosexuality directly to the national project and Cárdenas’s election, appeared a week later on October 22 and was reprinted in *El Nacional*, the government newspaper on November 1. Nearly four-dozen artists, writers, and others submitted a “denunciation” to the Comité de Salud Pública “in defense of Revolutionary Interests.”⁴⁷ The letter urged the committee to expel

the elements that hinder social orientations created through the educational reform and prepare an environment of opposition to the next Government that will be presided over by General Lázaro Cárdenas, making extensive their accords against the individuals of dubious morality that are holding official posts, those that with their effeminate acts, besides constituting a punishable example, create an atmosphere of corruption, that extends to the extreme of impeding the entrenchment of virile virtues among the youth.

The letter urged that the “fanatic” and “reactionary” had to be combated because they resisted “the new ideology” and “social elevation” and the influence of

those elements that by their foul nature and their incapacity of human creation, have precipitated a negative labor, contrary to every social sense and whose participation in whatever activity is moreover infertile, damaging, and transgressive to values.

The comparison between the ways that fanatics and reactionaries obstructed the Revolution’s social efforts was akin to the way that the “hermaphrodite, salaried by the government, infects the environment and they...are incapable of identifying with the workers of social reform.” Their presence in literature, theater, the plastic arts, and more was “deplorable” and had provoked the “indignation” of more deserving individuals, and their presence in the government had discredited “the nation and the most authentic values of Mexico.” Any work they did do was

⁴⁶ Armando Araujo, “Los homosexuales,” *Detectives*, October 15, 1934.

⁴⁷ “Una denuncia al Comité de Salud Pública,” *El Nacional*, November 1, 1934, sec. 2, 3. Some of the signatories were Manuel Maples Arce, Francisco Urquiza, and Jesús Silva Herzog.

nothing more than “propaganda of their vice.” The solution was to remove them from their posts so that the Revolution’s work could continue.

These events from 1934 show the ways in which homosexuality continued to be an important concern, particularly as homosexuals remained “useless” in promoting the ideologies that people like Diego Rivera and the signatories of the October 22 letter believed were crucial to Mexico’s success. Moreover, they show how even if the individuals in question were not clearly homosexual themselves, their aesthetics and world-views were perceived as incompatible with *mexicanidad* by those, like Rivera, who considered themselves the true arbiters of Mexican “authenticity.” In this way, homosexuality was also used as a discursive means of separating true Mexicans from those that were considered inferior, and beyond the discursive realm, proponents of “liquidating” the *maricones* from public life sought to effect material change in government. These efforts would meet only mixed success, as homosexuals like Salvador Novo would remain closely tied to the Mexican government for much of the rest of his life. Nevertheless, they demonstrate the seriousness with which some Mexicans viewed homosexuality, as well as the frustration that these felt when homosexuals continued “infecting” a revolutionary project that they wanted to exclusively control and define.

II. “Signs of Homosexuality:” Medical and Criminological Perspectives, 1920-1940

At the same time that national citizenship and Mexican virility were being debated in the public sphere, Mexican scholars and authorities sought to apply empirical methods—which were filtered through these lenses of personal and cultural biases—to the general population in order to reform the disparate groups that constituted it into revolutionary citizens. The data collection launched by demographers, eugenicists, and social reformers was mirrored by similar processes ongoing in the judicial and penal systems as the state brought the human body more fully under

its purview. No intervention was greater than that effected by the alliance between Mexican police, medical practitioners, sociologists, and jurists, particularly as these used neo-Lamarckian ideas of heredity and the influence of the social environment on genetics to justify their “reforms” of the poor. The irony, of course, is that the precise sectors of society tapped by the artists and writers above for their “authentic” Mexico and their ideals of virile citizenship—the proletarians and lower-classes—were those deemed dangerous, diseased, and delinquent by many social reformers. Moreover, these reformers found that homosexuality was rampant among the lower classes—just as it was among the artists and writers who had been criticized as anti-Mexican by people like Rivera and Marof. In other words, there were conflicting understandings of what the Mexican “normal” was, and these were shaped by local and transnational discourses in which ideologies overlapped, despite their apparent contradictions, thereby generating more ambiguity than clarity. If homosexuality could be found among the proletarians, was it a sign of moral degeneration that could be educated away? Was it hereditary and an inherent part of the “culture of poverty” itself or a product of capitalist excess inflicted on the poor? Was the ideal of the “new man” just that, an ideal whose validity was threatened by real circumstances? And where was the “normal” Mexican citizen to be found if not among the urban workers?

“Crimes of Cohabitation” and Signs of Homosexuality

Unfortunately, only a handful of case files remain (or at least, are accessible) that detail the forays into the queer world made by police and other officials interested in “cleaning up” the city.⁴⁸ However, those that do remain present glimmers of the intersections between homosexual desires and homophobic frameworks used to punish such desires, as well as some social

⁴⁸ It is possible that more of the *ultrajes a la moral* case files preserved in the AHDF are of individuals who arrested for homosexuality. However, without court or police descriptions—most of the files are very small—and given the prevalence of individuals arrested for production of or the selling of pornography, it is not possible to be certain.

historical background on the individuals involved. This is invaluable in pulling back the shroud on how men who desired other men lived in a period for which, previous to this project, only the stories of the most exceptional and visible homosexuals are known.

In January 1921, Leocadio Torres Rodriguez and Luis Sánchez Aguilar were arrested for *ultrajes a la moral pública y buenas costumbres* (outrages against morality and good manners) and *cohabitacion con otro hombre* (literally, cohabiting with another man, but a euphemism for sexuality).⁴⁹ Torres was a single, 23-year-old *zapatero* (shoemaker) originally from Leon, Guanajuato, while Sanchez Aguilar was a single, illiterate, 30-year-old man originally from Guadalajara.⁵⁰ While few details of where the men were discovered are provided in the court documents, both underwent a medical examination, which was a standard practice when prisoners were remitted into the penal system. Both showed “signs” of homosexual activity: Torres had “spilled sperm on his penis” and Sánchez had “signs of pederasty on his anus.” These “signs” were used as clear evidence justifying the incarceration and punishment of the men.

Many other men faced a similar fate in succeeding years; youths also faced examinations to determine if they showed signs of “pederasty.” For example, eighteen year-old Manuel Sánchez Ontiveros was surprised by the police kissing an older man named Pedro Juárez Hidalgo. Upon being examined by the Medical Section of the Tribunal de Menores, he was found to have “signs of passive pederasty.”⁵¹ Such examinations mirrored those conducted on female bodies, particularly young women, to determine if they were virgins; in both cases, a

⁴⁹ Cook, in his master’s thesis translates this term as “living together;” however, it is more likely that instead they were just caught having sex. For his perspective on the case, see Stephen Cook, “Containing a Contagion: Crime and Homosexuality in Post-Revolutionary Mexico City” (Master’s Thesis, University of California, San Diego, 2008).

⁵⁰ See “Case File 12/295: Luis Sánchez Aguilar,” January 11, 1921, AHDF, Cárceles, Lecumberri, Caja 12, Exp. 295.; “Case File 12/298: Leocadio Torres Rodríguez,” January 11, 1921, AHDF, Cárceles, Lecumberri, Caja 12, Exp. 298.

⁵¹ “Case File 2/1178: Manuel Sánchez Ontiveros,” May 1928, AGN, CTMI, Caja 2, Exp. 1178, AGN, CTMI, Caja 2, Exp. 1178.

premium was put on the signs supposedly left by penetration.⁵² However, as in the case of Torres and Sánchez, those perceived as the “active” participant, i.e. the penetrator, were also searched for signs that they had committed immoral acts. Thus, in the case of the male body, deviance could be found in multiple sites, not simply in those sexualized through penetration. In other words, “actives” did not necessarily—or usually—escape being labeled as homosexuals because they played the so-called “male” role.

What becomes clear in this twenty year period is that understandings of homosexuality continued to include the belief that homosexual behaviors and identities would leave physical signs that, when interpreted by a medical professional, criminologist, or even a cultural observer, could prove someone’s abnormality. While at the beginning of the period, such signs marked an individual more as a practitioner of homosexual behaviors, by the end, they could be used—in concert with other factors—to question an individual’s sexual orientation and identity. That is, to mark someone clearly as a “type.” Homosexual “signs” were thus prejudicial evidence both in terms of marking someone as a potential criminal, as well as a sexual deviant.

Case in point: the experiences of Torres and Sánchez, two men who did not fit the stereotype of *afeminados* in the period, either by cross-dressing and wearing makeup or by being campy dandies in art and intellectual circles. Instead, the men were from the popular classes. Their files contain some of the few remaining mug-shots of homosexuals arrested in the period.⁵³ Torres is shown in a white shirt and overalls, with a mustache and his hair parted on the left side; Sánchez wears a fuller mustache, has short hair, and wears a pair of shirts. Neither look like the images of *afeminados* captured by photographers in the period, such as one from ca. 1925 of a

⁵² See for example the diagrams and text on determining virginity contained in Gustavo Rodríguez, *Apuntes de medicina legal* (Mexico: Ediciones Botas, 1938).

⁵³ Others may exist, but they are not extant in the files preserved at the AHDF, and police files are notoriously difficult to view, given ongoing restrictions.

detained homosexual sitting on a table while officials stare at him. The man is wearing a dress and healed pumps. Another photo from 1933 shows both a homosexual man in a dress and clogs and a homosexual woman in a suit, both in the patios of the Belén prison surrounded by public agents. Nor do they look like the homosexual dandies of the wealthier classes, who appear in another photograph ca. 1925 in suits and ties in a portrait with a vase of flowers.⁵⁴ If the men did not have outward appearances that substantiated stereotypes, only through catching them in the act and doing a detailed study of their bodies could their homosexual behaviors be proven, as their “pederasty” was shown in the physical “evidence” found around their anuses and genitalia.

“Signs of Sodomy” and “Intersexual” States

The search for homosexual “signs” was not new, both in Mexico and elsewhere. Doctors and medical jurists who conducted examinations of accused criminals and victims had long looked for signs of deviant sexuality as evidence to support testimony in the cases they reviewed. They based their examinations on a set of medical beliefs about the body and the visible marks that sex between men was believed to leave; such beliefs had existed in some form for centuries and had been codified in the nineteenth century. For example, Spanish doctor Mateo Orfila argued in his *Tratado de Medicina Legal* (1847) that sodomy or pederasty would leave signs on the body, including a “rectum distended in the form of a funnel”, a sphincter “dilated and without resistance”, and surrounding flesh that was “thickened, slack, and inflamed.” “Passive” partners were those facing the most scrutiny.⁵⁵ In 1852, eminent German forensic scientist J. L. Caspar attempted to make the study of the sodomite anus more scientific in his *Handbook for the*

⁵⁴ *Inventario 818170: Homosexual detenido, sentados sobre una mesa*, Silver Gelatin Print, ca 1925, Fototeca Nacional, Judiciales, Detenidos.; Agustín Víctor Casasola, *Inventario 6626: Agentes del ministerio público y homosexuales en los patios de la cárcel de Belén*, Silver Gelatin Print, 1933, Fototeca Nacional, Judiciales, Detenidos.; and *Inventario 6628: Muchachos homosexuales junto a un jarrón con flores, retrato de grupo*, Silver Gelatin Print, ca 1925, Fototeca Nacional, Judiciales, Detenidos.

⁵⁵ Cited in Richard Clemençon and Francisco Vázquez García, *‘Los Invisibles’: A History of Male Homosexuality in Spain, 1850-1939* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), 34-36.

Practice of Forensic Medicine. All cases, according to Caspar, exhibited some signs, but habitual sodomy left two important marks: a “horn-like depression...towards the anus...and a *smooth condition of the skin* around the anus, apparently arising from the frequent stretching and friction of the skin” in those who had been penetrated.⁵⁶ For his part, French forensic medical doctor Ambroise Tardieu in *Les attentats aux mœurs* (1857) argued that both passive *and* active pederasts could be identified through physical signs, as the latter would have “pointy penises,” an idea that Caspar disputed.⁵⁷ Tardieu also claimed that pederasts had “excessive development” in their buttocks—perhaps this influenced the perspectives upon which Orozco based his illustrations.⁵⁸ From physical signs, Tardieu claimed could deduce the mental and moral characteristics of the pederast, which included “physical and mental laziness, as well as intellectual and moral weakness;” pederasts were “fearful, anxious, jealous, disloyal, and untrustworthy...capable of shrewd manipulations and terrible acts of violence.”⁵⁹

The meaning of such signs in Mexico was not limited to these scholars; indeed, the idea that there were homosexual “types” who could be recognized by somatic and behavioral characteristics originated from Cesare Lombroso’s school of positivist criminology. Lombroso had also postulated that there were “born criminals”—in his disciple Enrico Ferri’s terminology—and that criminals represented a “regression” to an inferior stage of human development. This set the stage to denounce homosexuals as a dangerous social type, as well as

⁵⁶ Cited in Ivan Crozier, “All the Appearances Were Perfectly Natural: The Anus of the Sodomite in Nineteenth-Century Medical Discourse,” in *Body Parts: Critical Explorations in Corporeality*, ed. Christopher Forth and Ivan Crozier (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005). Crozier details the various other scholars, particularly in England, who produces manuals asserting that anal penetration would leave physical characteristics.

⁵⁷ Ambroise Tardieu, *Les attentats aux mœurs* (Grenoble, France: Editions Jérôme Millon, 1995). That there were both active and passive pederasts would reappear in Mexican criminology and sexology.

⁵⁸ L. Thoinot, M.D., *Medicolegal Aspects of Moral Offenses*, trans. Arthur W. Weyse (Philadelphia, PA: F. A. Davis Company, 1927). French medical jurist León Henry Thoinot compiled his own tome in 1911, again asserting that physical evidence could corroborate sexual deviance, but also expressing skepticism about many of Tardieu’s conclusions and the signs that were actually accurate for diagnostics. He summarizes the debates at the time on pages 214-225.

⁵⁹ Jeffrey Merrick and Bryant T. Ragan, *Homosexuality in Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 141.

justified the anthropometric examinations of “criminal” bodies, particularly those of youths, until the 1970s.⁶⁰ Historian Gilbert Joseph, citing the work of Dain Borges, Pablo Piccato, and Mary Gibson has stated that the weak central states in Latin America, like Italy itself, “found in Lombroso’s concoction of anthropology, biology, medicine, and law a compelling rationale for monitoring, categorizing, disciplining, and centralizing control over their still-fragmented and regionalized populations.” Positivist criminology also allowed a secular, rather than Catholic, approach to delineating who was normal and those who posed threats, while also providing for the construction or maintenance of racial hierarchies.⁶¹ To that, of course, could be added gender and sexual hierarchies built on notions of virility and heteronormativity. Another layer added on top was the Neo-Lamarckian idea that physical conditions and behavioral traits could be gained from the previous generation, particularly through the social environment, which would both directly influence an individual and impact the hereditary characteristics that they would pass along to the next generation. Concerns over syphilis and alcoholism figured prominently in the sociological and medical evaluations in case files, again particularly for youths.

⁶⁰ Criminologists in other Latin American countries also embraced, at least for a time, Lombroso’s ideas. However, many had abandoned him after the heated international debates over his methods and ideologies that circulated at the end of the 1800s and early 1900s. See Carlos Aguirre, *The Criminals of Lima and Their Worlds: the Prison Experience, 1850-1935* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 38-41. Nevertheless, Mexican scholars—and the popular press—continued finding him useful for decades. This may be due to the way that they, like other Latin Americans, appropriated portions of ideas that suited their aims without necessarily adhering to the whole system. See Gilbert M. Joseph, “Preface,” in *Crime and Punishment in Latin America: Law and Society Since Late Colonial Times*, ed. Ricardo D. Salvatore, Carlos A. Aguirre, and Gilbert M. Joseph (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), xv.

⁶¹ Ibid. One of the first Mexican positivist criminologists was Carlos Roumagnac. See Carlos Roumagnac, *Los criminales en México: Ensayo de psicología criminal* (México: El Fénix, 1904); Carlos Roumagnac, *Crímenes sexuales y pasionales: estudio de psicología morbosa* (Mexico, D.F.: Librería de Ch. Bouret, 1906); Carlos Roumagnac and Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística Sociedad, *La Estadística Criminal En México* (México: A. García Cubas, 1907). His investigations in Belén prison have been written about extensively. See Pablo Piccato, ““Such a Strong Need”: Sexuality and Violence in Belem Prison,” in *Gender, Sexuality, and Power in Latin America Since Independence*, ed. William E. French and Katherine Elaine Bliss (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 86-108; Rob Buffington, “Los Jotos: Contested Visions of Homosexuality in Modern Mexico,” in *Sex and Sexuality in Latin America*, ed. Daniel Balderston and Donna J. Guy (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 118-132; Martin Nesvig, “The Lure of the Perverse: Moral Negotiation of Pederasty in Porfirian Mexico,” *Mexican Studies / Estudios Mexicanos* 16, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 1-37.

There was also Sigmund Freud, who had self-identifying proselytes among Mexican scholars. One of the most notable was Raúl Trujillo y Carrancá, a criminologist who claimed to also be a passionate Lombrosian positivist and who would write on the “sexual problem” in prisons and the Islas Mariás penal colony throughout the 1930s for journals like *Criminalia* and other publications.⁶² Freud’s ideas of “sex as a drive” would figure prominently in the studies made on solving the sexual problem that appeared in the 1930s.⁶³

Beyond these perspectives, the scientist who had the greatest impact on Mexican sexology (and sexual criminology) was Spanish sexologist Gregorio Marañón. He was concerned with a different sort of “sign” that marked sexual abnormality—that of the intersexual state. During the 1920s and 1930s, he argued that humans were essentially hermaphrodites, due to hormonal and psychological blends of “male” and “female”. These two halves would fight for dominance in everyone; the ideal outcome would be the victory of the gender expression that correctly corresponded to one’s sex, but an individual constantly had to fight against the “enemy” within his or herself. This was because both sexes

persisted in a human being throughout his or her life, mixed up in accordance with different dosages and not in unchangeable proportions but in variable ones in the course of life. That is, with the possibility that the principal sex is weakened and, by contrast, the secondary sex is strengthened through the action of particular physiological or pathological influences.⁶⁴

Within this paradigm, Marañón also asserted that the sexes needed to be differentiated from an early age to prevent sexual confusion. Male homosexuality was in part due to the failure to

⁶² Raúl Carrancá y Trujillo, “Sexo y Penal,” *Criminalia*, no. 2 (October 1933): 9-11.

⁶³ Rubén Gallo, *Freud's Mexico: Into the Wilds of Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2010), 199-230. Gallo’s chapter on Carrancá and Freud is brilliant, and stemmed from Freud’s possession of Carrancá’s penal law treatise from 1937. They also had an epistolary exchange.

⁶⁴ Gregorio Marañón, “Nuevas ideas sobre el problema de la intersexualidad y sobre la cronología de los sexos,” in *Obras Completas: Artículos* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, S.A., 1968), 165. Originally was published in December 1928 in *Revista de Occidente*, vol. 4, no. LXVI. See also his *Tres ensayos sobre la vida sexual*, originally published in 1927 and revised numerous times and his *Evolución de la sexualidad y los estados intersexuales* from 1930, found in volume 8 of the *Obras Completas: Ensayos* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, S.A., 1972).

complete sexual differentiation, leaving the male homosexual in an undeveloped state. Other factors that could contribute to homosexuality included a child being “seduced” and the long-term maternal influence in a child’s life. Puberty was a critical moment when these factors would come together to determine a youth’s future. Marañón’s perspectives on homosexuality were complex, incorporating hormonal explanations, psychological elements, and environmental factors. This eclecticism appealed to Mexican medical jurists who, like Marañón, fused various theories together to work in their local reality.⁶⁵

Mexican criminologists and sexologists, then, deployed an eclectic mix of ideologies and evaluation regimes that, on the surface, would seem to at times to not always complement each other. This tension can be seen in the disagreements over whether homosexuality was a biological abnormality, an inherited conditions, something produced by the social environment, a sign of degeneration into a criminal type, or a congenital condition. Yet, these diverse ideas were deployed in aggregate as a matrix—made up of psychological, physiological, sociological, educational, and other evaluations—against which homosexuals had little chance of appearing normal. As new procedures and theories emerged, these were added to the medical jurist’s toolbox, but not necessarily wholesale, as elements of previous, even contradictory ideas were maintained because they served the larger purpose of delineating certain types as abnormal.

As the above cases of Aguilar, Sánchez, and Manuel Sánchez Ontiveros show, Mexican doctors adopted the ideas that sodomitical signs could be found on the body. However, the problem with such physical signs was their variability in the individuals examined and the disagreement among medical professionals over what constituted a legitimate sign and whether such a sign actually provided evidence of habitual penetration or was caused by something else. Thus, between 1920-1940, and particularly in evaluations of youths, many Mexican doctors

⁶⁵ Cleminson and Vázquez García, *Los Invisibles*, 111.

incorporated other methods of finding evidence based on the approaches of the scholars above. This did not mean they abandoned sodomitical signs as evidence; on the contrary, a willingness to accept physical signs persisted in Mexico for decades. Instead, it meant they instituted new evaluation regimes on the body that, like the “signs,” would be read subjectively; together, a larger corpus of evidence could be marshaled to prove an individual’s deviancy, although what the outcome of the evaluation would be depended on who made the evaluations.

In 1932, *Gaceta Medica de Mexico* published Ramón Pardo’s piece on “medical criteria in penal law” that linked endocrine understandings of homosexuality to crime. The article is a treasure trove of Mexican medical-juridical thought, as Lombroso’s “criminal types,” Lamarck’s idea of heredity being influenced by the environment, Wimmer’s ideas of endocrinological effects on the body and psyche, and “Darwin’s “natural selection” all make an appearance and shape the overall criteria being outlined. Marañón’s ideas of endocrinology also appear in relation to homosexuality (*homosexualismo*), and the article claimed that homosexuality was a problem that had been “solved” by the discipline. As a “neuroglandular organic disturbance,” it could be “cured” through the techniques pioneered by Steinach and Lichtenstein who transplanted “normal” gonads into a homosexual’s body. In light of this form of “cure,” “an individual susceptible of curing himself of homosexuality...merits punishment, conforming to Marañón’s exact phrase, as much as a diabetic suffering from glycosuria,” i.e., not at all.⁶⁶

Indeed, to some scholars, punishing homosexuality was both counterproductive and insensitive. For example, the authors of *La educación sexual en la escuela Mexicana* cited Marañón to make their own case for the need to study and discuss the causes, prevention, and treatment of homosexuality. Marañón himself also asserted that education be applied to prevent youths from a “fall” into sexual indifferentiation, a task with which the authors of the Mexican

⁶⁶ Ramón Pardo, “El criterio médico de derecho penal,” *Gaceta Médica de México* (January 1, 1932): 10.

sexual education manual agreed.⁶⁷ And, although he did not cite Marañón, Pedro Zuloaga, in a column on sexual education in *El Nacional* in 1933, offered a similar ideas, stating homosexuality was a “phase” along the proper developmental road, with some forty percent of children around age twelve expressing such desires and the number dropping thereafter; only adults still expressing narcissism and homosexual interests were perverted.⁶⁸

Yet, even if homosexuality was not necessarily a crime (although it was still treated as such through *ultrajes a la moral*) it still was a disorder to be treated, as it marked a failure for proper sexual development. For criminologists, tests that would show endocrine disorders could also serve as evidence in determining someone’s sexuality, which was considered, ala Lombroso, an aggravating factor given it was a disorder. And, not all authors used Marañón’s ideas in the same way. For example, authors in *Criminalia* frequently built their own eclectic arguments about homosexuality in part based on the types of “evidence” others had described. Dr. Alfonso Millán, the medical director of the notorious Manicomio General de la Casteñeda—a hospital and asylum for the mentally ill—mentioned various ideas about homosexuality as a hermaphroditic state and also made note of the marks that would help in “medico-legal diagnostics” to determine passive homosexuality, showing that the physical signs had yet to leave the discourse. But the key for the doctor was that homosexuality marked an imbalance that would carry over to an individual’s psyche, which posed a danger to society. Indeed, “They are incapable of living in society as useful elements,” Millán wrote. A homosexual

should be seen as a sick person, but his cure is not in giving him power, because then his dangerousness grows. In our environment, already rickety and rich with politicking and intrigue, the homosexual is a producing element of the highest degree of every class of conflicts.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Cleminson and Vázquez García, *Los Invisibles*, 105.; Juan L. Soto and A. Perez y Soto, *La educación sexual en las escuela mexicana* (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Patria, S. A., 1933), 116.

⁶⁸ Pedro Zuloaga, “La educación sexual,” *El Nacional*, September 17, 1933, sec. 1, 3.

⁶⁹ Alfonso Millan, “Carácter antisocial de los homosexuales,” *Criminalia* 2, no. 4 (December 1934): 49-54.

As such, rather than a moral basis for rules against homosexuality, Millán urged a “scientific” basis for “social prophylaxis” against the danger posed by homosexuality.

Writing in *Criminalia* the following year, Peruvian scholar Susana Solano also asserted the dangers homosexuality caused. “It is indisputable that the homosexual being embodies an evident social danger, because he lives an antinatural, deviant life, without contributing to the reproduction of the species,” she wrote. Even worse, the social threat that the “consortium” of homosexuals posed—i.e. their social world in which they exerted influence over others—was very grave, as “homosexuality can be contagious, especially when the homosexual comes in contact with individuals with mental illnesses or with individuals that potentially possess the same tendencies.” Like her peers, Solano called for education and other preventive measures to prevent homosexuality from taking further root. And, once again, she asserted that while homosexuality might be a pathology—and therefore was not a crime—it should still be regarded as a “dangerous state” that needed treatment and against which society must secure itself.⁷⁰

The biases expressed by even the most well-meaning of these authors demonstrates how homosexuality, even when decriminalized, still was seen as an abnormality that was dangerous to the individual and society at large. This is why sexuality in prisons so concerned criminologists, as in such a situation, men were at the mercy of forced abstinence and a largely single-sex environment that denied them “natural” ways to satisfy their cravings.⁷¹ “Treatment” still required the annulment of homosexuality as a practice or an identity. And the perceived danger that homosexuals posed allowed for stereotypes of homosexuals as criminals to continue. When the state actually found a crime and discovered sexual deviance either as part of the initial crime or a characteristic of the individual, it could become an aggravating factor.

⁷⁰ Susana Solano, “El homosexualismo y el estado peligroso,” *Criminalia* 2, no. 10 (June 1935): 137-139.

⁷¹ Carrancá y Trujillo, “Sexo y Penal.”

Murder, Margarito, and the Infundibular Anus

Sixteen years after Torres Rodriguez and Sánchez Aguilar's case, a thirty-five year-old married retail merchant originally from Jalisco state named Margarito was examined by Mexican doctors Benjamin Argüelles y Alfonso Quiroz Cuarón. Nicknamed "El Puto", a derogatory name that he may not have chosen himself, he had been arrested for the murder of another thirty-five year-old man named Elías, who allegedly had been robbing Margarito and his housemates of their personal possessions under the pretext of leaving his laundry to be washed with Margarito's, since they used the same service.⁷² During their evaluation published in the journal *Criminalia* in 1937, the doctors noted the presence of an "infundibular", that is "funnel-shaped," anus. For the two medical jurists, the presence of such a "sign" was proof of Margarito's passive homosexuality. This "sign" became apparent during the battery of medical, endocrinological, and sociological examinations through which the doctors put the inmate as part of the established practice of investigating the origins of criminal behavior.⁷³

As part of their investigation, Argüelles and Quiroz Cuarón interviewed Margarito's eighteen year-old housemate Aurelio P. A. who described how he had met Margarito by accident five or six months before the incident. Then, approximately two months before the murder, Aurelio and his mother moved in with Margarito due to economic difficulties and at Margarito's invitation. Margarito allegedly abused the situation, "making love to [Aurelio] as if they were a man and woman." Moreover, Aurelio declared that "when M. arrived home drunk, he obligated him to have carnal relations with him." Margarito denied Aurelio's charges and he denied being homosexual. He only admitted that after meeting Aurelio, they once went to a hotel together with

⁷² This could be translated, depending on the context, as "faggot" or "man-whore", stemming from its origin as the masculine version of *puta*, a word meaning "bitch" or "prostitute/whore".

⁷³ Benjamin Argüelles Medina and Alfonso Quiroz Cuarón, "Un peritaje somático-funcional," *Criminalia* IV, no. 4 (December 1937): 232.

some women. And he'd also "been" with Aurelio's sixty year-old mother while Aurelio was at work. However, when examined by "medical-jurists", Margarito exhibited "signs of passive pederasty", while Aurelio exhibited "signs of active pederasty."⁷⁴ In other words, the doctors continued to believe that such activities left signs, much as scholars had nearly a century before.

Other factors contributed to the doctors' "diagnosis." Margarito doted on Aurelio in a manner reflecting other relationships, including those between homosexuals. He stated during his interview that he "always paid" for their outings together, such as a visit to *tepachería* or a drink and some tacos or a visit to the cinema, which the "boy loves greatly."⁷⁵ This social evidence was augmented by further physical and endocrine exams that found he suffered from hypogonitalism, i.e. a condition of retarded sexual development caused by a defect in hormonal production from his testes. Indeed, Margarito reportedly had insufficient function in his testicles, caused by a premature onset of *senilismo* (i.e., premature old age).⁷⁶ Margarito also underwent psychological examinations that found him to have an "inversion of his sexual instinct" as well as mental tests that showed he had oligophrenia, a mental deficiency making him both prone to pederastic perversions and crime.

Margarito's alleged homosexuality posed an "interesting problem" for the medical jurists for a number of reasons. Margarito had children, and he denied having had sexual interactions with other men. However, the deciding factor was his "infundibular anus", which the doctors took as a definitive sign of insertive homosexual behavior. Like in Torres and Sánchez's case,

⁷⁴ Ibid., 233.

⁷⁵ A *tepachería* is a business selling *tepache*, a fermented drink made out of pineapple flesh and rinds, spiced with cinnamon and sweetened with brown sugar, and mixed with beer. The drink originates from Sonora. This case also raises questions of what exactly being "active" meant for Mexican men having sex with other men. While in a sexual sense, Mariquito was the "passive" pederast with men—although "active" with women—in an economic sense, he was the "active" one. Unlike the situations described by anthropologists in the late 1900s and early 2000s—in which an effeminate homosexual or travesti provided for a "real" man who played the part of a husband and often "active" sexual partner—the situation between Mariquito and Aurelio paralleled relationships in which the "man" of the relationship provided for the less-privileged, younger partner.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 241.

“signs” of homosexuality were used to confirm criminal behavior. Yet, in the more thorough evaluation of Margarito, they were used as a determining factor in pronouncing he *was* homosexual, despite his marital status and the fact he had biological children, not simply that he had committed a crime. In other words, such signs were key evidence that an individual was a homosexual “type”, and they could trump other considerations or reinforce those that the medical jurists cited as “proof” of an individual’s criminality and inherent sexual deviance. In Margarito’s case, the social, psychological, anthropometric, mental, and somatic examinations helped define him as a type, so that the authors felt justified in disregarding his own claims to the contrary—he was proof of Solano and Millán’s fears about the danger posed by homosexuals and their potential for crime (hence the article being published in *Criminalia*). Whether or not his own claims were accurate, the case showed the power that state agents had in examining and defining someone brought into their purview. What happened to Margarito would happen much more frequently to youths due to the belief that they, unlike the older man, could be reformed.

III. Raising Future Citizens: Sexual Educations, Advice for Mothers, The Tribunal de Menores, and Youth Homosexuality, 1920-1940

Despite the efforts to the contrary and repeated calls for “social prophylaxis,” “deviant sexualities” continued, along with other forms of vice and crime, among Mexicans, much to the consternation of those who tried to eliminate them. Like adults, Mexican youths would come under increasing state scrutiny in the post-Revolutionary period as an effort to remedy this continuing problem. As the state sought to produce the sort of future citizens that it desired, it brought education, social reform of delinquent youths, and even detailed examinations of youth bodies—to prevent the degradation of the Mexican race—more fully into its purview. Two significant examples of this were attempts to educate youths about sexuality and proper gender identities and the founding of the Tribunal de Menores in 1927 to reform delinquent youths.

Sexual Educations

In July 1921, Alfonso R. Ochoa's article "Problemas de educación" appeared in *El Amigo de la Juventud*, the publication of the Sociedad Mexicana Sanitaria y Moral.⁷⁷ Ochoa was a prominent member of the Sociedad and a professor of anatomy, physiology, and hygiene at the Escuela de Comercio. An advocate of sexual education, and prolific writer, he published a sixty-page pamphlet on masturbation (which he labeled as Onanism) in 1914; he also gave several lectures on sexuality at the Ateneo de Juventud, including "Conveniencia de la abstinencia sexual en los jóvenes", "Las ventajas de la continencia sexual", and "El onanismo."⁷⁸ These presentations, which included projected images, were repeated at the Mexico City YMCA as part of their educational lecture series and promotion of sexual education.⁷⁹ Ochoa, and others like him, were the scientific vanguard of the erotic revolutions of the 1920s, and they sought to apply their expertise to the "sexual problem" even during the height of the Mexican Revolution.

Ochoa's 1921 article was part of a debate on sexual education with Dr. Ernesto González Tejada, another member of the Sociedad. Ochoa was largely a biological determinist who argued for the primacy of endocrine secretions in causing homosexuality, while Tejada was an environmental determinist. Their cordial debate showcased the diverse opinions on the origins of human homosexuality, as well as foreshadowed the eclecticism Mexican scholars would deploy in their engagement with sexuality in general and treatment of homosexuality in particular. Ochoa challenged Tejada's assertion that either extreme severity from parents or "exaggerated fussiness" would cause homosexuality. Instead, he argued that it was well known that the

⁷⁷ Sanitary and Moral Society of Mexico.

⁷⁸ The Ateneo de Juventud was an association of intellectuals, writers, philosophers, and artists during the last stages of the Porfiriato and during the Revolution. Ochoa's first two talks were on abstinence from sexuality, while the latter was about masturbation. For a list of talks at the Ateneo, see Juan Hernández Luna and Fernando Curiel Defossé, *Conferencias del Ateneo de la Juventud* (Mexico, D.F.: UNAM, 2000), 409-414. Ochoa was not the only one to present talks on issues related to sexuality, as other scholars at the Ateneo did as well.

⁷⁹ The YMCA frequently ran the same talks as those at the Ateneo, and those that were repeated there can be found in Hernández and Curiel's text.

“primordial cause” of homosexuality was “an inborn disturbance in the endocrine functions of the generative glands”, i.e., gonads. He continued,

The testes of the *afeminado* produce hormones similar to those of the ovaries, like the ovaries of the *marimacho* produce hormones similar to those of the testes, and more careful education may perhaps achieve in these unfortunates an appearance appropriate to their sex; however, it will not remove the homosexual inclinations nor the ambiguity of the secondary sexual characteristics.

In other words, nurture could not change nature, but it could shape appearances. Since the problem of homosexuality was hormonal, it could be cured through medical means that reformed the hormonal imbalances that an individual faced. Ochoa cited a German physician, whose name he could not remember, who had recently “cured” homosexuality using an implanted testicle.⁸⁰

Ochoa demonstrated his own eclecticism in succeeding paragraphs, noting that single-sex environments—such as prisons—could produce homosexual behavior. This would seem to suggest that he believed in multiple forms of homosexuality—that caused by endocrine functions and that caused, at least situationally, by the environment—although he does not explicitly state so. Through “contact with individuals of the other sex,” such situational “perversions” would disappear, leaving only the anomaly of “degenerates”. Ironically, this was why Tejada argued in favor of mix-sex classrooms and schools, which offered ample interaction between the sexes. Ochoa dismissed this idea as impractical, even disastrous for Mexican youths. As an instructor at the Escuela de Comercio, Ochoa cited his first-hand experience of boys mocking girls in the classroom or spending too much time in the “contemplation of the feminine figure that education in common puts by his side,” disruptions that were far more threatening to the educational

⁸⁰ It’s possible that he’s talking about the several experiments reported on in the *Archives Médicales Belges* of July 7, 1919, 7. In the article, the grafting experiments done by the Russian doctor Voronoff are discussed, as well as the efforts of the American surgeon Lydston and the Dutch surgeon Steinach, the latter who “reported the cure of a homosexual by implantation of a testicle.” The article also mentions a case of a man who had a testicle transplanted after being castrated during World War I, which was mentioned by Ochoa’s article. See reference to this article in “Testicular Grafts and Surgical Opotherapy,” *Medical Record*, November 22, 1919, 847.

mission. This interaction was not required because the “danger of the deviation of sexual inclinations that occurs among inmates does not exist when education is not sequestered.”

Rather than school, the home was the best place for youths to enjoy mixed-sex mingling, under the watchful eyes of adults, and where they could engage in “diversions and honest games.” Through such games, a boy would grow “to see the woman as an equal being to him.” However, one who lacked interaction with girls and referred to “love stories”—presumably of the more erotic type—would let his imagination run wild with thoughts with the “aura of mystery and unhealthy attractions” that he believed a woman could provide. Such a boy would fear to be in the presence of a girl, a situation favorable to the “development of Onanism.” Ochoa’s idealistic vision seems difficult to take on its merit; if young men were distracted by the “feminine figure” in class, why would they not be so outside of class, including during “honest games?” Why would such interactions not also facilitate masturbatory fantasies? And if the sexes were separated, where would the youths turn for their more “intense passions” if not to masturbation and/or their friends or classmates?

Tejada and Ochoa found themselves at odds over the causes of homosexuality. Female companionship, then, was either necessary to stave off masturbation and homosexuality, or being a potential catalysis for sexual desires that, when coupled with single-sex school environments, might actually cause those very behaviors. Yet, both were concerned about the need to orient youths correctly through sexual education. For Ochoa, this meant that either parents or specialists in “natural history and hygiene” should teach youths only when the moment arose, rather than teaching them things that would awaken their curiosity or let them fall into the hands of “ignorant or perverse persons.” And for both, prejudices, particularly those born through religion, served as nearly insurmountable barriers to their efforts.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, new efforts would be made to educate youths, and these included attempts to understand sexuality scientifically, rather than dogmatically. In 1922, the surgeon and doctor Eduardo Urzaiz, Rector of the Universidad Nacional del Sureste in Mérida, Yucatán, weighed in with a 178-page, self-illustrated manual for teachers about biology entitled “Conferencias sobre biología,” showing the debate was not limited to the capital. Sexuality was among the topics covered, including a section on hermaphroditism.⁸¹ A more prominent text, *La educación sexual en la escuela mexicana*, appeared in 1933. This book, directed at parents and teachers, addressed numerous issues related to sexuality and instruction, including a large section on homosexuality. On one hand, the text offers what could be read as a significant expression of sympathy for homosexuals:

In our country (at least in the capital), it is well-known that homosexuals are persecuted, incarcerated, and confined in the Islas Marías penal colony. This social conduct besides being cruel is far from producing the effects that it proposes, because...homosexuality is an intersexual state with deep organic roots for which it is understood that no law, human or divine, will manage to be an efficient brake against the overbearing force of instinct.⁸²

The timing of this comment, during the firestorm of debate over sexual education, is significant, and it coincided with evolving appreciation of the plight of homosexuals among some Mexicans, such as expressed by writer Judith Martínez Ortega, whose memoirs of time at the penal colony feature prominently in the next chapter.

On the other, the text offered a long list of what was “known” about the differences expressed physically on the bodies of homosexual men (as well as women) that were believed to be due to the intersexual state and hormonal differences. Among these included higher levels of “feminine” hormones in the blood and urine of homosexual males, despite the apparent lack of

⁸¹ “Un nuevo libro de Médico Cirujano Prof. Eduardo Urzaiz, Rector de la Universidad Nacional del Sureste,” *Boletín de la Universidad del Sureste* (April 1, 1922): 183-185. Urzaiz was an internationally known Cuban scholar. The university was the precursor to the Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán.

⁸² Soto and Perez y Soto, *La educación sexual en las escuela mexicana*, 115.

“bisexual” structures in the testes (which interestingly did not make the authors question Marañón’s intersexual thesis); the skin—which in homosexual men was “delicate and fine as it was in puberty”; the teeth—with the canines less developed and the incisors more “feminoid” in shape; in body structure, as homosexual men had “feminine or adolescent dimensions” and a pelvis developed in such a way to make them walk effeminately; and finally limited body hair.⁸³

Certainly, not everyone agreed that youths should be learning about sex, let alone about homosexuality in such detail from their parents or instructors. In general, the reaction from Catholic groups, particularly from women, was virulently opposed to such information.⁸⁴ So great was the debate over sexual education that it fomented the publication in the press of a compendium of views from all sides in the early 1930s.⁸⁵ At the core was whether or not teaching youths about sex created “schools of perversion,” if the lack of information was instead the cause (since deviants, including homosexuals, could infect others in the social environment), or if Mexico was sliding towards the perceived hedonism of countries like Soviet Russia.⁸⁶

However, not all Christians were against sexual education. For example, the YMCA had already fostered sexual education as part of their overall curricula during the revolutionary period. In 1929, the Protestant publication *El Abogado Cristiano* printed a bulletin by the Legión Juvenil de Acción Social (LJAS), a Christian-orientated youth organization. The piece mixed

⁸³ Similar identifying characteristics would be described five years later by Brazilian Leonidio Ribeiro in his famous treatise *Homosexualismo e endocrinologia*, which James Green explores in his excellent work *Beyond Carnival*. See Leonidio Ribeiro, *Homosexualismo e endocrinologia* (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria Francisco Alves, 1938).; and chapter 3 of James N. Green, *Beyond Carnival: Male Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). Like with the Mexican scholars, Marañón heavily influenced Ribeiro, even writing the introduction to his book.

⁸⁴ See the discussions in Belinda Arteaga, *A gritos y sombrerazos: historia de los debates sobre educación sexual en México, 1906-1946* (México: Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, 2002). See also Alan Knight, “The Mentality and Modus Operandi of Revolutionary Anticlericalism,” in *Faith and Impiety in Revolutionary Mexico*, ed. Matthew Butler (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 34.

⁸⁵ *Algunos datos y opiniones sobre la educación sexual en México* (México: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1934).

⁸⁶ On Soviet Russia’s relationship to homosexuality, which was far more complicated than expected in Mexico, see Dan Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). On the fascinating intersection between the Soviet Union, Mexico, film, and homosexuality through Sergei Eisenstein, see Masha Salazkina, *In Excess: Sergei Eisenstein's Mexico* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

references to noted scientists—including Spanish doctors Marañón and Luis Jiménez de Asúa—with those to various Christian student groups and social hygiene groups in England, France, Argentina, and Uruguay. All of these “advocated vigorously for the diffusion of a more noble and dignified concept of the sexual question”, i.e., a version of sexual education that, in the hands of parents, teachers, ministers, and youths themselves, was beneficial, rather than sensational and tawdry. The LJAAS sought to start a similar movement in Mexico and urged readers to donate so that they could address the “urgency of confronting the problem of orientating properly our youth in order to overcome this enormous obstacle of life.” Quoting the words of Spanish scholar Luis Jiménez de Asúa, the bulletin insisted that it was important “that the adolescent does not discover the mystery of the sexes with help from ignorant individuals or through the most abject readings,” sentiments that echoed Ochoa eight years earlier. Indeed, the youth should not “lose their innocence before coarse and mocking words, from servants, or in the pages of pornographic books, that give a false and ruinous idea of the sexual life.”⁸⁷

That there was an alliance, even if informally, between scientists and social reformers in the Protestant religious sphere should not be surprising, as they were committed to projects of development that had included sexual education for nearly three decades.⁸⁸ The text also revealed the class and racial stakes of sexual education: middle-class and wealthier families—who could afford servants—had to protect their youths from the degenerating influences of the poor and working-classes, a view in-keeping with the social reforms directed at these sectors

⁸⁷ “Legión Juvenil de Acción Social, Boletín No. 10: Una empresa esforzada,” *El Abogado Cristiano* (March 14, 1929): 7. Jiménez de Asúa, who was famous for writing the Spanish Republican constitution, was another of the important figures that influenced the Spanish Latin American forms of criminology and medical jurisprudence emerging during the first half of the twentieth century. He also said that homosexuality itself was not a crime.

⁸⁸ Protestant educator Moisés Saenz, for example, straddled both camps in his promotion of physical culture and association with the YMCA.

during the period.⁸⁹ In addition, they had to protect them from the “abject” and “pornographic” texts or cultural productions that would educate them in inappropriate ways.

Education did not always succeed, particularly for those sectors of society that had less access due to familial or economic situations, and even youths raised in “good” homes could “fall.” Thus, by the early 1920s, sentiments among criminologists, politicians, and social reformers favored the creation of new youth tribunals and specialized laws for youths. By having a separate system, the conditions and experiences of youths, which were deemed distinct from those of adults, could be more easily addressed; moreover, youths could be protected from the corrupting influences of adults in prisons, which had previously served as “schools of vice.” For example, in 1895, journalist Heriberto Frías reported on the lamentable conditions in which youths resided in the Belén prison. In the special “Pericos” section where they were housed, youth lost what “dignity” they had left either by choice or at the initiation of other “spent and prostituted” youths already there. This was due to living conditions marked by a poor environment—“nauseating odors”, insufficient food, poor medical care, and oven-like heat—and the “puffs of abjection and ignoble vice from the rest of the human agglomeration” that wafted from the adult parts of the prison. Sexual violence was common in a place where “moral and physical deprivation worse than that of the beasts” germinated among the inmates.⁹⁰ A decade later, Carlos Roumagnac interviewed male youths at Belén and queried them about their sexual lives, once again finding sexual violence a reality that they faced.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Enrique Ochoa has described the various roundups of the poor and how they were understood as “types” worthy of arrest even if not actually engaged in undesirable behaviors. See Enrique Ochoa, “Coercion, Reform, and the Welfare State: The Campaign against ‘Begging’ in Mexico City during the 1930s,” *The Americas* 58, no. 1 (July 2001): 39-64.

⁹⁰ Heriberto Frías, “Crónicas desde la cárcel,” *Historias* 11 (December 1985): 50-51. Originally published as a series of articles in April 1895 in *El Demócrata*.

⁹¹ Roumagnac, *Los criminales*.

Based in part on realities such as Frías and Roumagnac described, reformers had discussed since the late nineteenth century the need for special laws, courts, and reform schools for youths, who unlike adults, were seen as redeemable. The Tribunal de Menores thus opened in 1927 and stepped in to correct ills caused by failed parents.⁹² As Judge Salvador Lima explained during one of his radio broadcasts on youths and the Tribunal's work, "the crime of the child is the crime of the parents, of the family, and of the society."⁹³ That is, social relationships and the social environment, as well as heredity, were to blame for juvenile delinquency, and the former could even imprint its legacy upon the latter. Lima's view mirrored the eclectic approach of Mexican criminologists and medical jurists who looked for a variety of characteristics as the origins of deviance and delinquency. The role of the Tribunal was thus to shape the child for himself, for his family, for society, and for his nation, so as to prepare a better future for all.⁹⁴ Among those youths that ultimately would come under the purview of the Tribunal were, in Lima's view, those "perverted sexually in the street," "servants in immoral occupations," "venders of obscene cards and pamphlets," those "accused of committing sexual faults in cinemas," and those who had committed "immoral acts suggested in passionate films."⁹⁵

Youth Sexuality, Public Spaces, and the Tribunal de Menores

Numerous youths were apprehended for deviant sexual behaviors in the 1920s and 1930s; many more, during the evaluations conducted by social workers, psychologists, educators, and medical professionals, were found to practice or have practiced "sexual perversions." These evaluations can be found in the Tribunal de Menores case files (many more than those cited below), and they include far more detail than their counterparts preserved elsewhere. For example, in April 1927,

⁹² In fact, adults were largely believed to be at blame for youth delinquency.

⁹³ Salvador M. Lima, *Los niños moralmente abandonados* (Mexico: Herrero Hermanos Sucesores, 1929), 28.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

fifteen year-old Ricardo Reveles Guerrero was caught in the Cine Montecarlo by policeman 2826 of the Third Precinct in the “moments in which he committed immoral acts with another individual.”⁹⁶ Specifically, Ricardo was charged with “touching the sexual parts” of one Juan Garcia, a man who lived at number 53 República de Cuba street, which not coincidentally was right in the middle of one of the working-class areas of *ambiente* in the capital. Once admitted to the Centro Escolar “Belisario Domínguez,” Ricardo exhibited “good behavior,” an April 20 report stated. Eventually, the boy was released back into his father’s custody because his father was an “honorable man” and member of a “well-organized family” who expressed his shame at his son’s actions, thereby fulfilling his duty as a penitent father before the state and someone who would better train his son to likewise be honorable. Like Ricardo, eighteen-year-old Manuel Sánchez Ontiveros was caught kissing with an older man. Upon being examined by the Medical Section of the Tribunal, he was found to have “signs of passive pederasty.”⁹⁷ When interrogated, Manuel admitted to two previous encounters with other males—both youths.

City dormitories could also serve as sites of sexual interaction between young men. A dormitory watchman found Manuel Jiménez Vargas (nearly fourteen years-old) and Fidencio Sánchez (age ten) lying together in bed in “hardly moral postures” in May 1934.⁹⁸ The boys, neither of whom had previous entries before the Tribunal, were brought before Profesora G. Zuñiga, a judge at the Centro de Observación e Investigación for the Primer Tribunal.⁹⁹ According to social worker Esperanza Balmaceda de Josefé, who evaluated Manuel on the

⁹⁶“Caja 1/233: Ricardo Reveles Guerrero,” April 1927, AGN, CTMI, Caja 1, Exp. 233. One of the documents in the file lists Ricardo’s age as thirteen years, but I am using the information listed on the medical examination. The cine Montecarlo was the site of violent riots related to modern girls, showing it was a contested space in terms of gender and sexuality. See Rubenstein, “The War on Las Pelonas.”

⁹⁷ “Case File 2/1178: Manuel Sánchez Ontiveros.” Remarkably, although Manuel was eighteen years of age, he was still regarded as a “minor,” rather than as an adult.

⁹⁸ “Case File 30/8733: Manuel Jiménez,” May 1934, AGN, CTMI, Caja 30, Exp. 8733.; “Case File 30/8734: Fidencio Sánchez,” May 1934, AGN, CTMI, Caja 30, Exp. 8734.

⁹⁹ The judge was an unmarried woman, according to the Tribunal documents. Women were frequently in position of authority, whether as social workers or as judges, in the Tribunal at the time.

judge's behalf, the boy refused to confess his faults despite being caught by the guard. Instead, he asserted that he had not had sexual contact with Fidencio and that it had been the same who had invited him and sought to excite him. Balmaceda, however, was not convinced: "I think that it was José as much as Fidencio," she concluded, because already "they habitually practice certain sexual perversions."¹⁰⁰ For his part, Fidencio when interviewed by social worker Carmen Martínez, denied that he had instigated the "acts of sexual perversion," as Manuel claimed. Martínez believed him, arguing it was only logical: Manuel was nearly four years older than Fidencio and more physically developed. He also suffered from *blenorragia* (gonorrhea), which "indicate[d] without a doubt his sexual activities." Martínez expressed skepticism that even if Fidencio was a "sexual pervert," which was unclear, that he would have begun matters.¹⁰¹

In the files, it is clear that officials regarded both the social environment and the hereditary qualities that youths were deemed to possess could lead to their delinquency. Manuel was an orphan of two alcoholic parents, taken in by his grandmother, then orphaned again shortly after she died and his elderly aunt took a job as a servant that prevented her from doing much for him. He was left to his own devices on the streets, sleeping in public dormitories or in the places where he worked. He had only attended school for three years. As a boy, he had worked near Irapuato, Guanajuato in a field with an uncle.¹⁰² In the capital, he worked on the street selling sweets for a man named José Rivas. However, Rivas's business struggled, and to make ends meet, the boy had also taken to singing on the street. When he had sweets to sell, he

¹⁰⁰ Esperanza Balmaceda de Josefé, "Estudio social del caso del menor Manuel Jiménez, su verdadero nombre es José González," May 12, 1934, AGN, CTMI, Caja 30, Exp. 8733.

¹⁰¹ Carmen Martínez, "Estudio social del caso del menor Fidencio Sánchez," May 12, 1934, AGN, CTMI, Caja 30, Exp. 8734.

¹⁰² Irapuato is located in the state of Guanajuato, over 300 km northwest of the capital and in between the industrial city of León and the colonial city of Querétaro

made 50 centavos daily, and singing brought him another 25 to 35. Some of this money was spent on his two passions: movies, of which he was a “huge fan,” and boxing matches.

In contrast, both of Fidencio’s parents were living and he had lived with them until just days before his apprehension. He too had seen familial turmoil; only a month after his birth, his parents had separated due to “conjugal infidelity” on the part of his mother. For nine years he lived with his mother, never attending school, a lack that had left him illiterate, nor devoting himself to anything. Then his mother deposited him with his father, moving far away and starting a new family, forgetting him, according to Martínez. However, living with his father made Fidencio productive, as he took up selling gum in the Zócalo, in Tepito, and other sites. He took his profits to his father, a merchant of sweets, who gave him a “satisfactory” cut as part of the family business.¹⁰³ While his father was a “good and honorable man,” he was “rustic” and “completely inconsistent in his moral duties to his son.” The man also suffered from chronic rheumatism, meaning he could not always work nor acquire the fifty centavos daily he normally earned. Fidencio, according to his file, more than made up for this, earning up to a peso daily (meaning he was more successful than both his father and Manuel). Other income in the household came from his stepmother who worked outside the home.

Fidencio’s job had put him in the street for two years selling gum for eight or nine hours a day, “without more orientation or vigilance than his own free will.” Only ten days before his apprehension, he decided not to return home, heading to the public dormitories to sleep. That is where he had met Manuel. For the court officials, it made sense that both boys, having lived a significant amount of time on the street without proper family surveillance or education, had ended up within their jurisdiction. For example, social worker Balmaceda asserted that Manuel’s “sexual perversion” was explainable given his parents’ manner of living; both were drunks and

¹⁰³ Fidencio’s father bought his candies at the “El Triunfo” factory.

his mother lead a free and tormentuous sexual life.”¹⁰⁴ Combined with the lack of a proper home and familial protection, it was not surprising, from Balmaceda’s perspective, that Manuel lived in the manner in which he did. As she concluded,

Since he was five years old, he has been subject to the street’s influences. His morbid heritage and his neglected life have been essential factors in the development of his sexual perversion.

Manuel never stood a chance at a normal life, and his mother, from Balmaceda’s perspective, bore more of the blame for the boy’s sexual problems, as she had led a sexually licentious life and had exposed him to it. Similarly, Fidencio faced problems due to a lack of moral attention from his family, abandonment by his mother, and a father who was an inconsistent moral force in his life. In other words, neither boy had been properly shaped in the home, and that is what had brought them before the state.

In the court’s final report, dated June 18, 1934—a month after Manuel and Fidencio had been detained—several points are clear. In Manuel’s case, his limited education was blamed on his lack of familial oversight, broken home, and the influence of the “noxious” environment of the street; thus, when given a chance, he escaped from his “home” and took up his vagrant life. He had also confessed that he was going to commit sexual acts with Fidencio, a departure from his initial denials. His confession demonstrated that he could still be reformed. As important was the offers made by his half brother and employer José Rivas to take charge of him and see that he maintained a better path. In response, the Tribunal ruled that Manuel be remitted to a clinic or the Tribunal’s medical services to treat his *blenorragia*. Second, he was to attend a school, whether day or night, as allowed for by “the nature of the job to which he is dedicated.” Thus the prescription was to cure his body, educate him, and allow him to be a productive citizen (even at

¹⁰⁴ The court’s final report, signed by four authorities including Judge Zuñiga and the President of the Tribunal Roberto Solís Quiroga, asserted that Manuel’s mother was a prostitute.

the tender age of 13); he was to become, in other words, one of the “little proletarians” of which the Socialist ABCs spoke. Moreover, by reforming him, the Tribunal was fulfilling the state’s obligation to Manuel as a child / future citizen, as well as his rights to health and education, as stated in Articles 3 and 4 of the 1917 Constitution. Presumably he was allowed to work because he was nearly 14 years of age, the threshold for youths to legally work under Article 123, and because he lacked familial support. Work offered the boy not only structure in his life, but a means of self-reliance in a world that had so often turned its back on him.

Both social workers supported their respective youth vis-à-vis the other. Martínez on more than one occasion asserted that Fidencio was a “good boy.” Indeed, he had been “very industrious and hard-working,” and through his work, the majority of his home’s finances arrived. Yet, this work was in “the most dangerous of environments,” and the social worker was concerned that his father’s “terrifying inconsistency” and negligence—excusable insofar as he suffered from maladies—had deprived Fidencio the opportunity “to improve himself.” This is why he also might be “a little sexual pervert, a victim of the environment.” Thus, while Fidencio enjoyed a measure of home life, in comparison to Manuel’s tormentous youth, both boys had ended up in the same place: on the street and committing homosexual acts with each other.

What marked Fidencio differently was his medical examination, that discovered “endocrine deficiencies” that could be determined from the distribution of fat in his torso and was due, apparently, to his seeming lack of testicles. Fidencio, in other words, faced problems on two fronts—a home-life insufficient to educate him properly or prepare him morally for the future and physical deficiencies related to his endocrine system. Both made him vulnerable to homosexuality (considering the professional opinions described in earlier sections), whether his sexual deviance was a physical condition caused by his deficiencies or because of the social

environment in which he lived, which included areas dangerous both for their crime and the presence of homosexuals. His treatment regimen was to include *opoterapia* (organotherapy) in which he was to receive endocrine remedies prepared from animal organs. He also was to be “psychically reeducated.” Ultimately, it was determined that his home was adequate for him to be returned to, given that his parents had agreed to be more vigilant and to send him to school.

Yet, despite sustained attention to cases like these, the aims laid out for the Tribunal faced many obstacles. In November 1934, a report ran in the journal *Eurindia* about the realities that faced both young inmates and those who sought to reform them. Youths faced insufficient food rations, and should they get ill, the medical department lacked the “scientific apparatuses indispensable for analysis and examinations.” Attempts at reform—such as sending the youths to the Escuela Vocacional (Vocational School) to learn a trade—resulted in youths being apprenticed for a pittance, due to prejudice about their age, leaving an incarcerated youth to prefer selling periodicals or lottery tickets, “returning him to his infamous social circles and his old customs.”¹⁰⁵ Moreover, while the central building was designed for seventy-five youths, it housed 200 to 250 instead; in this way, its overcrowding mirrored that of other correctional and prison facilities. Due to this overcrowding, some youths had to sleep on the floors, some were placed in quarantine due to lack of space, and two youths to a bed was common. These “irregularities...provoked dangerous promiscuities” and made “vigilance of those youths who have inclinations to masturbation or homosexuality” impossible to maintain.¹⁰⁶ Thus, the site intended to reform youths could function instead as a school of vice.

Raising Virile Youths and Future Citizens

¹⁰⁵ “El Tribunal para Menores y Nuestra Juventud,” *Eurindia* V, no. 11-12 (November 1, 1934): 78.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Once a youth arrived at the Tribunal, he already was already in a “state of danger” that, as the problems discussed above show, could be unintentionally exacerbated by the reform system itself. Thus, it was far better to prevent him from needing the state’s services in the first place, and accordingly, efforts were made in the public sphere to ensure that parents, particularly mothers, used the “best practices” for raising youths, so that the social environment and family life did not contribute to their delinquency, as had happened with Manuel and Fidencio. An early example was a “competition for mothers” announced in *Excelsior* in 1924 whose theme was “The Best Education of the Mexican Child.” Applicants were encouraged to typewrite 200 lines about the theme and give condensed rules for how to impart this education in the home. According to the ad, “the study should instruct all Mexican mothers on how to make an educational foundation for their children, in accordance with our customs and necessities, separating them from negative foreign intentions.”¹⁰⁷

Part of what was required was the “toughing-up” of Mexican youth to resist these influences and other challenges life threw at them. As early as an October 1920 article, commentator Salvador Esperón had applauded the ongoing shift that—as part of the turn towards physical education and culture—had occurred among parents who now let their youths participate in sports once considered dangerous. Rather than growing up in sites of that were “musty due to isolation” and that led to sickness, making youths like “plants devoid of any air or sun,” youths were getting opportunities to skate, go to gyms, and to develop not only their “intelligence, but also the body and character.”¹⁰⁸

Yet, the concerns on how to properly raise youths remained. In a 1931 column comparing the dogmas of Christ and Nietzsche, R. Arévalo Martínez saw value in the philosopher’s

¹⁰⁷ “Concurso de las madres,” *Excelsior*, August 13, 1924, 8.

¹⁰⁸ Salvador Esperón, “Los patines,” *El Heraldo*, October 25, 1920, 9.

perspectives on living, particularly that “a man should be strong and love danger” and that man was an animal that must “conquer life everyday” or face death. Arévalo Martínez applied this perspective to one of the problems he saw facing Mexican society: the influence of the bourgeois home on youths. These middle-class homes, as well as those of the “aristocracy,” gave youths

an artificial environment that they believe is the stable environment of life and so they become *afeminados*. Parents, in a form that I repeat is totally artificial and unstable, take away struggle from their children, and these come to believe that life is a bowl of cherries (*todo el monte es oregano*) and that living is something easy.¹⁰⁹

Such parental actions deprived youths of the means of being strong and actively living their life with dignity, leaving them inferior beings, who could not survive effectively in the “real” world. Thus, just like the lower-class home was deficient, so too was the middle-class home.

Arévalo Martínez’s column illustrated a preoccupation on how best to raise children, particularly boys, so that they learned to be honed by struggle, rather than weak *afeminados*. “Proper” methods of rearing boys were disseminated through various means, including the competition above and advice columns directed at mothers. These proffered suggestions on raising children according to the methods advocated by criminologists, medical professionals, educational scholars, and other authorities, and they were popularized in newspapers and magazines. Specialists and cultural critics asserted that through these methods, a youth would not only avoid the penal system and reform schools, but also be the right sort of virile citizen that Mexico required, rather than degenerate into perversion. Moreover, gender norms would be maintained, and the potential contamination, in the neo-Lamarckian sense, of male youths by their home environment—and their mothers feminizing tendencies—could be avoided. The

¹⁰⁹ R. Arévalo Martínez, “Nietzsche, o el poeta de las doctrinas de afirmación,” *El Nacional Dominical*, July 2, 1931, 3. The article is fascinating because the author attempts to reconcile Nietzsche’s teachings with those of Christ together into a plan of action for living. In addition, like the Mexican scholars described above did with European scholarship, Arévalo Martínez took what he wanted from Nietzsche, as many of the individualist tendencies in the latter’s writings did not conform with Mexican revolutionary thought; nevertheless, ideas of an individual “conquering life” resonated with ideas of virile citizenship, even as they revealed the tensions between creating a strong individual and a revolutionary citizenry that was attune to the national developmentalist project.

methods also reinforced cultural expectations of motherhood that were related to the alignment of the private sphere with women, as the shapers of the men who would lead Mexico's future in public.

One area in which boys needed guidance was in the choosing of and participation in gender- and age-appropriate games and toys. In May 1936, Dr. Oscar Carrera asserted that mothers had a key role in this process, although women should only be vigilant over the activities of their youths, not restrict them in any way:

Excessively timid and "affectionate" mothers are not rare who prohibit their son from playing with his companions the games peculiar to boys, those which give them health and vigor, that teach them to be "little men" (*hombrecitos*), to be self-sufficient and to defend themselves against whatever aggression."¹¹⁰

Rather than producing a "quarrelsome" youth or "picker of fights," Carrera urged that such actions were part of inculcating in a boy the qualities of "valor, masculinity, courage, and the right and power of defending himself with his fists." These qualities, which would be among those Octavio Paz would later enshrine as integral to the "invulnerable" heterosexual male, were crucial to a boy's future role in society. "If a [boy] cannot associate with other boys," Carrera argued, a boy would associate "with girls and will participate in their games and will acquire their mannerisms, the result not being far from making him an *afeminado*." Even worse, such associations would tip the scales in the internal battle waged between the masculine and feminine, letting the Marañón's "enemy hidden within ourselves" emerge and to impose itself and "at the end to imprint its mark, making the boy a *mariquita*."

That Carrera invoked Marañón situated his advice squarely in the ongoing endocrinological and psychological debates on homosexuality. Marañón had argued that humans in general were essentially hermaphrodites, due to hormonal and psychological blends of "male"

¹¹⁰ Oscar Carrera, "En torno de un espectáculo maravilloso: juguetes y juegos," *El Nacional*, May 17, 1936, sec. La Mujer y el Niño.

and “female”. These two halves would fight for dominance in everyone; the ideal outcome would be the victory of the gender expression that correctly corresponded to one’s sex. Allowing boys to play with girls too much or to grow up without learning how to be virile and to fight mean aiding in victory of the “female” half.

Carerra’s article participated in a transnational conversation on raising boys. Two months before, another article—“Como hacer de tu niño un hombre” (How to Make Your Boy into a Man)—appeared in *El Nacional*’s “Mujer y Niño” section. This article-in-translation, written by US American columnist Ernst Riley, urged much of what would appear in Carerra’s later column. Boys should from an early age learn how to box and defend himself, as well as “climb, aim and shoot, ride a bike, and skate.” “Teach him yourself or learn with him” asserted Riley; in this way, a parent could participate in their child’s interests and earn their “confidence and camaraderie” while also fostering in him self reliance. Through this process, boys would learn to be audacious, without fear, disposed to experiment, and prone to gain experience.

The fact that this column appeared in the women’s and children’s section of the paper reveals the importance given to mothers over their children’s instruction and futures, from their gender and sexual identities to their fitness as men. Indeed, the article’s text seems to be directed at parents in general—or even a father—rather than a mother; yet, the piece was one of many to appear in *El Nacional*’s “women’s” section.¹¹¹ Another piece, appearing in September 1938, urged mothers to create homes where children knew they were loved and respected, where they would learn morality by “good examples” rather than through shame, and where they could always express their desires and thoughts openly, in a happy, friendly environment, “so that they

¹¹¹ Ernest Riley, “La nueva educación: Como hacer de su hijo un hombre,” *El Nacional*, March 15, 1936, sec. Supplement. *El Nacional* clearly shared Ernst’s opinions, even though he was a foreigner.

will never feel ashamed of their natural and personal thoughts.”¹¹² As if warning of the consequences of failure to train youths properly, the column was placed on the page directly next to the section “Bajo la Sancion de los Codigos,” a crime column which frequently detailed criminal behaviors, including homosexuality.

From age eight on, the piece continued, mothers should be a child’s “best friend” and the person to whom a child could confide all their “doubts and all that preoccupies them.” Thus, a feminine-dominated space was to be constructed where youths could express their concerns; this space, though, was double-sided: it was both a site intended for the security of the youth, but also for the nation, as the mother would be an individual who could intervene on the basis of what the youths confessed. That is, she could be both a confidant and confessional, whose proximity to the child and openness was balanced with the ability to orient behavior. This female-dominated domestic space also mirrored that created at the Tribunal de Menores, where youths were interviewed and evaluated in large part by female social and medical workers, who were considered more likely to get accurate statements from youths.

“As a good mother,” advised the article, “and the friend that you should be to your children, you must eliminate anything that would prejudice your child.” For example, mothers should never mistreat or hit their children because of the danger that “that they might enjoy it”, i.e. become masochists, nor should they practice “excessive rigidity and severity” because such actions “from parents prejudice the child’s spirit or soul, making it perverse.” Likewise, mothers should refrain from being “excessively affectionate with the boy or girl because that will also damage their spirit;” this directive referred to “principally the boys, who when bred spoiled and attached to their mothers, often become *afeminados*. You,” exhorted the columnist to the mother, “should ensure that the boy admires his father and desires to be always like him, hardworking

¹¹² “La atención del bebe: educación del niño,” *El Nacional*, September 12, 1938, sec. 2, 2.

and honest.” Following the Famous 41 and decades of homophobic discourse on virility, it was not a neutral claim to make that an improperly raised youth would become an *afeminado*. The implication was clear: sexual perversity was linked to the mother’s success or failure in raising her child and correctly orienting him to masculine role-models.¹¹³

In these texts, then, the foundations of the post-Revolutionary social system and its implications for the family, personal identity, and the Mexican nation can be seen. Not simply made of abstract ideas about virility, medicine, or criminology, the social system, as understood by the commentators presented here, required that youths should be encouraged to act and emulate appropriate male role-models, all the while under the watchful eye of mediating feminine guidance emanating preferably from a mother or other woman in the best place to serve as both a confidant and confessional-taking authority. The domestic and public spheres were thus still split on the basis of gender, and the behaviors that boys needed to survive in the “fight” of life had to be instilled at the earliest opportunity to produce the right kind of public citizen.

It should be noted that there was a critique of this overly *macho* system that privileged a certain understanding of gender and what was required of boys to “make” them into men. Doctor Telma Reca, in her own contribution to the women’s and children’s section, asserted that the undue emphasis placed on masculinity at the expense of femininity was a detriment to society. By viewing men as those who had “valor” and ridiculing boys who cried as “*mariquitas* o *mujercitas*,” they were engendering a sense of “superiority” in men over women that was harmful and damaging youths themselves.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, Reca still believed that sexual education was a necessity for the “defense” of a youth.

¹¹³ The association with masochism, another sexually “perverse” activity as described in the public sphere, supports my inference.

¹¹⁴ Telma Reca, “Temas de moral e higiene: Necesidad de la educación sexual, para la defensa del niño,” *El Nacional*, May 17, 1936, sec. La Mujer y el Niño.

Taking these articles at face value means that the boys' failure to move on from their "homosexual" phase would be an indictment of their home life. Indeed, if boys exhibited interest in activities or items generally associated with women or the female domestic sphere, they were regarded as an *afeminado* and even a pederast. Consider the case of Juan Velasco Gómez (also known as Juan Rodríguez Gómez) who appeared before the Tribunal and was evaluated starting in May 1927, for having run away from home, and again starting in March 1928, this time for theft. How old Juan was at the times he was apprehended is unclear; in the early case, he is marked as fifteen years old, while in the later case he is listed as only thirteen or fourteen. He was a sickly, "pallid" boy with an "ultra brachycephalic" head. Having no friends and a difficult home life in which he was maltreated by his mother's live-in boyfriend, he had one day run away from home in fear that it would be discovered he had not gone to school. Teodora Velasco, a woman who had "invited him constantly" to her home, who had offered him promises and gifts, and who had hidden him on previous occasions from his family, took him in. There he helped her iron and do laundry, "he was like a servant," and "he said that he enjoyed very much these feminine labors."¹¹⁵

This information was apparently sufficient for the Director of the Casa de Observación to assert that he was a "*pederasta*," even though there was not, surprisingly, an accompanying form detailing an investigation of his body for "signs," which, it seems were not needed given his gendered interests. These—along with his "feminine aspect" and passivity—were why his classmates bullied and mocked him, and he bore it all patiently, even gifting his classmates clothing and helping them in their work. Thus, while he exhibited positive qualities such as

¹¹⁵ "Caja 1/308: Juan Velasco Gomez," May 1927, AGN, CTMI, Caja 1, Exp. 308. Another youth who exhibited "feminine" qualities was Pablo Ayala García, who was known as "La Israela." See "Case File 1/429: Pablo Ayala Garcia," June 1927, AGN, CTMI, Caja 1, Exp. 429, AGN, CTMI, Caja 1, Exp. 429.

obedience and good performance at school, he nevertheless did not express the more masculine character of standing up for himself, nor identify well with his similarly-aged counterparts.

The view that Juan was a *pederasta* again was again stated when he was evaluated by a Tribunal social worker in March 1928, when the youth was thirteen or fourteen years old. This time, Juan stood accused of stealing a sweater from his godmother in spite, due to a beating he had received from her. The social workers and Tribunal determined he was guilty of the theft, that he was a liar, and that he exhibited a “docile, effeminate character” and that he was very keen to do “domestic” occupations. Under the category of “the sexual sphere,” the comment simply marked him as “*pederasta*,” yet the file again contains no mention of the boy having been caught having sex with another male or admitting to such behaviors. Two possibilities remain: either he openly admitted such behavior—at which point it is odd that there was not a more strenuous reaction from the Tribunal—or it was *assumed* that he was homosexual on the basis that he preferred to do activities deemed feminine, had an effeminate bearing, and was docile. Such an assumption would hearken back to the turn-of-the-century images produced by Posada, such as the classic image entitled “El feminismo se impone” (Feminism Imposes Itself) where men were shown dressed in feminine attire and doing domestic chores, from ironing and sewing to cooking and caring for a child.¹¹⁶ Juan’s interest in such tasks marked him as deviant; “feminism” had imposed itself on his character. He still had few friends, rarely frequented places of entertainment, and preferred to do domestic chores even more than going to the cinema.¹¹⁷

Once again, youth’s faults were tied to the social environment in which he had been raised. His mother did not provide a good home, “living like a jackal” in only one room that was

¹¹⁶ The image appeared in *La Guacamaya*, July 25, 1907.

¹¹⁷ In the social worker’s view, the fact that he stayed home seems to be the worse offense, as places of entertainment were also cited as bad influences on youth. In this way, the greater concern was that he had abandoned the public sphere and instead chosen the domestic sphere.

“disorganized and foul-smelling” and in which there were “immoral scenes.” She had “abandoned” both Juan and his twelve year-old sister there while she worked outside the home as a cook, and her live-in boyfriend of nine years was a “drunkard and vice-laden man” who treated both poorly. His father had apparently died of tuberculosis, leaving him without a clear father figure. While his godparents’ home was much better, this familiar legacy had already exerted a prejudicial force on his life.

Juan was again reprimanded and castigated by the Tribunal, as well as interned at the Casa de Observación and the Escuela Correccional for several months (from February 6 through at least July 21, 1928). On the latter date, the Tribunal ruled that he be returned to his godmother, as she, rather than his biological mother, had the resources to provide a good home. Moreover, she had long been concerned that he go to school and had taken charge of him on more than one occasion. In other words, she was fulfilling the mother’s role, as expected by the state, in contrast to his biological mother, who had allowed her son to be lured into the clutches of another woman who sought to employ him in feminine trades, thereby contributing to his degradation.

What is usually unclear in these files is how youths themselves felt about homosexuality. Little information exists to shed more light. A survey of schoolboys conducted in 1932 revealed that of those interviewed, only two percent admitted to “liking men sexually.” When asked if they would want to change that tendency, one percent responded in the affirmative and one percent said no.¹¹⁸ There are a number of reasons to be cautious when considering this information, not the least of which is that the sample size is unclear. Youths also were self-

¹¹⁸ Alfonso Segura Albiter, “Técnica sobre información sexual en la adolescencia,” *Eugenesia* 4, no. 45 (July 1943): 3-20. Segura Albiter conducted the study himself in 1932, and while he acknowledged that he asked “audacious questions,” he felt it was necessary due to the fact there was no statistical data on sexual activities from which actions could be taken. I assume that by one percent the author meant that half of the two percent who liked men sexually wanted to change, rather than only one percent of that total group. Other interesting information in the survey included that 65% of the youths had their first sexual experiences with prostitutes.

reporting on their behaviors, and given the stigma associated with homosexual behavior, the percentage who participated in such is likely low and reflective of what students thought the researchers wanted to hear. Nevertheless, the survey's remarkable implication is that indeed a population of youths so enjoyed or identified with their sexuality that they were unwilling to have it changed. Juan may have been one of these.

Conclusion: Political Hermaphroditism, Deviant Ethnicities, and Defining the Real Man

It is fitting to return to the realm of the political in which this chapter began, and then, after working through an extended example, link the various sections once more together. The July 16, 1937 *El Nacional* article “Apuntes de actualidad: Juventud, divino tesoro (Current Notes: Youth, Divine Treasure),” written by Mónico Neck, foregrounded the significance of homosexuality to ongoing debates on Mexican political, ideological, and cultural identity. To do so, Neck condensed concerns about national progress, the role of youth and the aged, the position of science and ideals, fears of transvestism, and the requirements of “being a real man” into a diatribe on the “farce” of neutrality. All of this as told through a comparison in which strength and normalcy were found in the productive antagonism between opposing sides—politically or sexually—while the space in between was the domain of undesirable “political hermaphroditism,” neutrality, and homosexuality. For Neck, the “social war” to determine Mexico’s political future was akin to the war between the sexes: there were only two sides possible in any confrontation— masculine and feminine, rightist and leftist—and no room for a politically androgynous middle or a third political axis / sex that threatened the whole system. In a sense, Neck’s article demonstrated the political consequences of the “fight” showcased by the film *¿Afeminado?* and by the sources described above, particularly when an individual was not successful in jettisoning the ambiguity around masculinity to assert a dominant identity.

As Neck wrote, “The reader must know that neutrality has never existed and that precisely those who claim to be its most enthusiastic and severe champions, have been raping her constantly and scandalously.”¹¹⁹ Indeed “neutrality doesn’t exist. And if it exists, it is the purgatory attributed malevolently to the arbitrary imagination of the Demiurge: it is neither heaven nor hell.” Neutrality, he continued, is “farce, because the man that believes in nothing, nor is capable of taking a definite position in the fight, does not merit glory nor condemnation. And, less, the title of man.” He continued:

In the universal fight, centrists don’t count. And the neutrals are superfluous. They are a burden for the two great divisions of Humanity. People cursed by some and by others. Hated for their cowardice. And for their indecision. And for their inutility.

Then, Neck drives the link between neutrality, centrism, and homosexuality home:

Neutrality—said in other terms—is to social struggle what homosexuality is to society’s life. The men of the left and of the right—the true men—in view of a neutral don’t know if it’s a man dressed as a woman or a woman dressed as a man. Homosexuality is diffuse and colorless. As neutrality is colorless and diffuse.¹²⁰

One wonders if Neck had ever seen a drag ball at Veracruz’s Carnaval or if he had been paying attention to the flamboyant descriptions of *afeminados* in the press, none of which were “colorless.” This glib critique aside, the use of homosexuality here as a basis for a simile is significant, because it builds on the paradoxical idea of homosexuality as passionless, passive, flimsy, and cowardly—at a time that it was also perceived as actively dangerous and a real threat—while also linking political centrism and neutrality with homosexuality. Moreover, transvestism emerges again as a threat to the nation and something to be feared, as does the specter of the “third sex,” insofar as the real men on either the right or left would not be able to

¹¹⁹ Mónico Neck, “Apuntes de actualidad: juventud, divino tesoro,” *El Nacional*, July 16, 1937, sec. 2, 1.

¹²⁰ Neck used *homosexualidad* in this paragraph, showing the term’s growing publicity in the Mexican public sphere. 1937, according to Alan Knight, was a year both of growing inflation and the peak of official strikes in all of Mexico’s basic industries; thus, it was a contentious time to be choosing (or not) one’s political positions. See Alan Knight, “Mexico, c. 1930-1946,” in *The Cambridge History of Latin America: Latin America since 1930, Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean*, ed. Leslie Bethell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 34.

tell who a centrist really was, much like an *afeminado* or a *marimacho* could “dupe” others into thinking they were a woman or man respectively.

Political hermaphroditism as related to homosexuality also plays on the derivation of *mafrito*, a slang term for homosexual described by at least the 1898 *Diccionario de mejicanismos*. Here is the definition:

Mafrito, adj. (from Veracruz): Useless, cowardly, effeminate. A vulgar corruption of the term *hermaphrodito* (that which gathers in itself the two sexes; from Hermes).¹²¹

The term thus referred to the physical biology, appearance, and behaviors of what would become known as the “third sex.” Related terms included *manflorito*, which was in use in Guerrero and Michoacán and *manfrito*, which was in use in Cuba. By speaking of hermaphroditism and homosexuality, Neck was situating his argument in a linguistic genealogy that associated sexual ambiguity and the third sex with uselessness and cowardice, one that continued at the time of his writing.¹²² *Manflorita*, *manflor*, and *manflora* remained synonymous terms for *afeminado* (with the added meaning of *sodomita*) in 1934, and *manflorita* and *manflora* remained in use in Mexico in 1937.¹²³ In fact, as late as 1946, a version of the term—*mafrio*—still existed in

¹²¹ Ricardo Gomez, *Diccionario de mejicanismos* (Mexico, D.F.: Herrero Hermanos, Editores, 1898).

¹²² The words used in the genealogy may have been changing rapidly. Two critiques of the 1927 dictionary published by the Academia Española de la Lengua claimed that *mafrito* was not used in Mexico and that it was among the hundreds of errors committed in the text. Prof. Marcos E. Becerra, for his part, argued that *mafrito* was a misspelling of *manflorita*. Yet, given that the 1898 *Diccionario de mejicanismos* had presented the two terms as related, albeit in different regions of Mexico, it is more likely that there was a shift in the word used, or that Becerra was unaware of the more regional terms that had been used in the past, particularly as he described *manflorita* was a corruption of the term *hermafrodita*, precisely what the earlier 1898 dictionary defined the word to be. Becerra, like the other critic Dr. Augusto Malaret, also challenged the term *mamflora* (from Honduras, synonymous with *sodomita*), stating it was more likely a misspelling of *manflora*. While Becerra said the term did not exist in Mexico, Malaret in 1937 listed it among his large list of synonyms for the term *afeminado*; others were *maricón*, *manflorita*, and *joto*. In other words, regional differences, the ongoing development of Mexican slang terminology for homosexuality, and the difficult task of accounting for all these differences most likely contributed to the claims made by both scholars, particularly when the ties to the earlier terminologies remained intact. For the articles in question, see Augusto Malaret, “Otros 469 errores del diccionario de Madrid,” *Investigaciones Lingüísticas* 2, no. 2 (June 1934); Marcos E. Becerra, “Observaciones sobre los 'otros 469 errores del diccionario de Madrid',” *Investigaciones Lingüísticas* II, no. 5 (November 1934); and Augusto Malaret, “Voces fines,” *Investigaciones Lingüísticas* (September 1937).

¹²³ See Malaret, “Otros 469 errores del diccionario de Madrid,” 221.; Becerra, “Observaciones sobre los 'otros 469 errores del diccionario de Madrid',” 405.; and Malaret, “Voces fines,” 55.

periodical *La Crítica*'s "Diccionario Enciclopédico", still bearing the meaning of "coward or *afeminado*." The publication asserted, when discussing the politics of the day, that "as the application of this term could hurt greatly, we will abstain from applying it, even though it is well known to us that more than four merit it."¹²⁴

Beyond the realm of politics, even presumably heterosexual men who traded on their sexual attractiveness were regarded as "cowards and traitors" by an author writing in *Detectives*. These *fifis*, gigolos, and *señoritos* were the playthings of the sexually-liberated modern girls who went to cabarets, and they had ceded masculine gender roles—insofar as such roles were defined in terms of masculine "activeness" or aggression—in favor of being kept men. Such men were repugnant were examples of a new modern breed of man in which could be seen the creeping passivity that advocates of "virile literature" had admonished;¹²⁵ they were among, in the words of Efraín Huerta's 1937 poem *Declaración de odio*, the residents of the "sarcastic city where cowardice and cynicism are the daily bread of young pimps of undulating sizes, of women she-asses, of the empty men," among whom were the "rampant *maricones*."¹²⁶

The association between homosexuality and cowardice operated as well at another dimension in Mexican society, reinforcing negative perceptions of other groups, including immigrants, indigenous groups, and even sectors of mainstream society that were deemed too far removed from physical labor. One example was the status of the nation's small Jewish population, which despite its size, nevertheless was subject to criticism. By the 1930s, anti-Semitism was running high in Mexico. As scholar Laura Pérez Rosales has argued, the rise of Lázaro Cárdenas to the Mexican presidency in 1934 coincided with an upswing in both anti-

¹²⁴ "Diccionario Enciclopédico de la 'Crítica', Madeja-Magnate," *La Crítica*, January 15, 1946.

¹²⁵ Carlos de Lara, "Los 'cinturitas' de academia," *Detectives*, October 21, 1935, 13, 16. See also Manuel Múzquiz Blanco, "Los 'fifis' delincuentes," *Detective*, December 21, 1931.

¹²⁶ Efraín Huerta, "Declaración de odio," in *Poesía completa* (Mexico, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1988).

Seminitism and anti-Spanish sentiment emanating from the Mexican right-wing through claims of Jewish/Communist conspiracies and anti-immigration tirades. During Cárdenas's sexenio, a blending occurred of anti-Cardenista and pro-Fascist/National Socialism rhetoric from both mainstream rightist papers *Excelsior* and *Novedades*, as well as more right-wing papers like *Omega* and *El Hombre Libre*. Like other rightist elements in society, these newspapers attacked Spanish refugees and Jews for a number of reasons, but principally as an indictment of Cardenista reforms.¹²⁷ Groups like the Pro-Race Committee in the capital, who had participated in the Sinophobia of Mexican nationalism in the 1920s, also drafted racist legislation by the 1930s against Jews fleeing Europe.¹²⁸ Such anti-Semitic, anti-communist, Hispano-Christian, and ultra-nationalist commentaries flourished as Nazi Germany emerged as an attractive business partner in large part because it lacked the colonial legacies of the United States and Britain.¹²⁹

In May 1936, in the middle of this debate, an article titled “Es nefasto el judío en México” (The Jew is Detestable in Mexico) appeared in *Detectives* magazine.¹³⁰ Author L. F. Bustamante asserted that Jews were worthy of derision because they were not Christian, had an alternative language and set of customs that set them apart, and were not really the “sons” or “children” of a place and therefore, as immigrants, were not actually part of the national body politic.¹³¹ Bustamante played on fears and anti-Semitic sentiments that had been circulating in Mexico for years. In an August 1924 editorial in *Excelsior* argued Jewish immigration—while

¹²⁷ Laura Pérez Robles, “Anticardenismo and Anti-Semitism in Mexico, 1934-1940,” in *The Jewish Diaspora in Latin America* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), 184.

¹²⁸ Alexandra Minna Stern, “From Mestizophilia to Biotypology: Racialization and Science in Mexico, 1920-1960,” in *Race & Nation in Modern Latin America*, ed. Nancy P. Appelbaum, Anne Macpherson, and Karin Alejandra Roseblatt (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 192.

¹²⁹ Friedrich E. Schuler, *Mexico Between Hitler and Roosevelt: Mexican Foreign Relations in the Age of Lázaro Cárdenas, 1934-1940* (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 47.

¹³⁰ The word *nefasto* is related to another term, *nefando* (abominable) that had been used to describe sodomy for generations. While not strictly synonyms, both were used to describe something or someone that was disgraceful or even wicked and contrary to divine law or nature. *Detectives* commented on a range of articles it felt were important for its readership, and since Jews were, from its perspective, tied to crime, they were appropriate subjects.

¹³¹ L. F. Bustamante, “Es nefasto el judío en México,” *Detectives*, May 11, 1936, 13.

taking into consideration their intelligence, hard-working qualities, and abilities—was not “the most desirable for this country.”¹³² The article compared further Jewish immigration to previous immigration by the Chinese, whose presence in Mexico’s northwest had become a “serious problem that few can ignore.” Another article appearing in March 1935 in *Detectives* labeled Jews as a group to be feared for their business practices and their control over prostitution, thereby linking fears of their business acumen to sexual deviancy and exploitation.¹³³

Claudio Lomnitz has argued that in Mexico, many “anti-foreign manifestations have centered on commerce” and “material culture,” from anti-Spanish sentiments in the early republic to the xenophobia expressed against Chinese merchants in Sonora during the Revolution and the anti-Semitism (and Anti-Arab sentiments) of the 1930s. As will be clear in later chapters these anti-foreign sentiments would be applied to the United States as well.¹³⁴ What is more, these anti-foreign fears often were couched in fears of national betrayal and feminization, as well as anti-homosexual terms, even in colloquial terminology. Inhabitants of Querétaro, for example, used *juilón* to refer to Jews (usually *judío*), as well as cowards (*cobarde* and *correlón*), and effeminate homosexuals (*maricón*).¹³⁵ Such connections had been made for decades throughout much of the Western world, and as new understandings of the body, psychology, and medicine developed, the “perversions,” “hysteria,” and “illnesses” of Jews and homosexuals were seen as parallel, particularly as both were believed to exhibit signs of incomplete masculine

¹³² “La colonización judía,” *Excelsior*, August 21, 1924, 5.

¹³³ See “Los Judíos controlan la prostitución,” *Detectives*, July 1, 1935, 5, and “El peligro judío en México,” *Detectives*, March 18, 1935.

¹³⁴ Claudio Lomnitz-Adler, *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 131.

¹³⁵ Manuel Muñoz-Iedo y Mena, “Dialectología del Español de México: formas usadas en el Estado de Querétaro,” *Investigaciones Lingüísticas* 2, no. 2 (June 1934): 129.

development, such as could be found in the “effeminate” voices that allegedly marked both Jews and homosexuals as aberrant from the “norm.”¹³⁶

Thinking of Jews as cowards—and thus weak, effeminate, and potentially homosexual—also linked them to perceptions that the occupational sphere they inhabited was limited to professions and academic endeavors removed from physical labor. Lack of physical prowess was seen at the time as a cause of social and moral degeneration, including that found in both Jews and male homosexuals.¹³⁷ This is why one “treatment” for homosexuality was the removal of individuals from environments like the city that enabled them to live less physical lives, in favor of the rural countryside, where images of the productive lower-class farmer toiling honestly for the nation were evoked.¹³⁸ The double association of cowardice and homosexuality marked them as distinct from virile Mexican citizenship and yet again apart from the body politic. Both groups were labeled as *nefasto*, i.e. “harmful,” by their critics.¹³⁹

Neck’s piece also raised the connection between hermaphroditism and the problem of transvestism, of being “duped” by one’s appearance rather than one’s authenticity. Neck

¹³⁶ On the parallels between the ways in which Jews and homosexuals were regarded by turn-of-the-century science and discourse, see Sander L. Gilman, *Freud, Race, and Gender*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), particularly pages 132-168.

¹³⁷ See for example the argument made in Paul B. Franklin, “Jew Boys, Queer Boys: Rhetorics of Antisemitism and Homophobia in the Trial of Nathan “Babe” Leopold Jr. and Richard “Dickie” Loeb,” in *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question*, ed. Daniel Boyarin, Daniel Itzkovitz, and Ann Pellegrini (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

¹³⁸ “La escuela al aire libre y sus magnificos resultados en el campo de la educación,” *El Nacional*, November 20, 1932.

¹³⁹ For *nefasto* as a term applied to homosexuals, see Jaime Luna, “Los homosexuales y las tribadas,” *Detectives*, October 25, 1937. Interestingly, despite the ongoing racist and homophobic discourses circulating in the 1930s, Mexican “...eugenicists’ mestizophilia seldom translated into calls for cohesion based on the exclusion of groups labeled as “undesirable” such as the Chinese, Africans, Syrians, Jews, and Gypsies.” Yet, the vision of racial integration these eugenicists espoused also contained a unspoken corollary that the “eventual outcome of racial mixing would, over time, be the disappearance of *mestizos* themselves from the national landscape and the concomitant ascendancy of whites or Creoles.” And, at times, this “wish” for the demise of the *mestizo* surfaced, such as in a 1932 talk given by Dr. Rafael Carrillo to the Mexican Eugenics Society, who stated that there were three problems facing Mexican eugenicists: “ethnicity and ethnology, heredity, and immigration.” See Stern, “From Mestizophilia to Biotypology,” 192. Juxtaposing Neck’s idea of the neutral and passive middle vs. the idea of *mestizaje* offers another vantage point then for exploring the tensions in defining *lo mexicano* and who was and was not going to be included within its definition. After all, how could a race truly be “cosmic” if it included “inferior” groups prone to cowardice who were not themselves virile enough to be examples of the new man?

described two forms: the transvestism of a man dressing as a woman or vice versa; the former had been a common trope in Mexican discourse for decades. For example, Orozco lampooned members of Francisco Madero's cabinet in an image appearing in *El Ahuizote* in November 1911 by portraying them as prostitutes in a brothel surrounding a chaste and beautiful nun representing the nation.¹⁴⁰ The men appear in dresses, their mustaches intact, an image that immediately invoked Posada's broadsheets of the Famous 41, which not coincidentally had occurred almost exactly ten years before Orozco's image. Another example found in an anonymous letter sent to president Abelardo L. Rodríguez (1932-1934), marked Narciso Bassols, secretary of education, advocate of comprehensive sexual education, and patron of the Contemporáneos in the Mexican government, as a "hermaphrodite." The attack was meant to discredit Bassols, who had unleashed new efforts at incorporating sexual education into Mexican schools.¹⁴¹

Hermaphrodites, after all, were not real men.

Neck concluded his piece by stating that "in the dramatic fight of the century, there are not nor can there be more than two sexes: the masculine and the feminine." He continued:

The social war excludes the political hermaphrodite in the same way that Love excludes the androgyne. Youth, divine treasure, and old age, wealth of experience, and maturity—which is the moderating force between ideal and science—advocate, sometimes, progress. And others, decline or maintenance, always putting in danger interests and lives. But they never vie for doubt or cowardice. What is the role of neutrality...¹⁴²

No answer was needed, as no role for neutrality—nor homosexuality—existed in a nation being defined through the virile, masculine citizen-worker or even his reactionary opposite. What is fascinating is that both the proto-Fascist, anti-Semitic groups and the Mexican Left used similar terms when describing those that they believed were not true Mexicans. They both had bought

¹⁴⁰ Orozco, "Sainete, drama y barbarie": *Centenario, 1883-1983*, 32-33. Originally published in *El Ahuizote*, November 25, 1911.

¹⁴¹ Arteaga, *A gritos y sombreros: historia de los debates sobre educación sexual en México, 1906-1946*, 87.

¹⁴² Neck, "Apuntes de actualidad: juventud, divino tesoro."

into a certain form of patriarchal social structure and the idea of virility as a quality of being Mexican, even as they remained opposed ideologically to each other's political interests. Both, in other words, hated the political hermaphroditism of the middle, and for both, the homosexual—that “intersexual state” in Marañón's terms—would remain a convenient foil.

This chapter has shown how discourses of masculinity, as juxtaposed against male effeminacy and homosexuality, entered into prominent debates about Mexican identity and nation between 1920-1940. Moreover, it has shown how these discourses found in politics, art, criminology, and medicine all reinforced prejudices against homosexuality as a means of defining the “new man,” what was “normal,” and who belonged in those categories. Homosexuality was not a passing concern for Mexican artists, thinkers, politicians, and pundits, nor was it a trivial matter for those who wanted to mould youths into useful future citizens. For an “adolescent” nation seeking modern “maturity,” it is not surprising that youths became a prime focus, as national maturity was linked to the virile maturation of the citizenry. Yet, the problem was that no amount of preparation, vigilance by feminine authorities, or appropriate child-rearing could ensure that the internal battle cited by Marañón, as well as the battle against external perversions, would be won. Stray too far to either side of moderation, and a child would end up as a homosexual. But the center, if Neck was right, was not safe, either. Training a youth to be overly moderated would also threaten them with the specter of the homosexual menace. Thus, it appears that to make sure a man would be a man—to make new citizens in a time in which formal citizenship was primarily enjoyed by men—was a rather tricky endeavor.

The period between 1920-1940 was marked by sustained efforts to effect a new “normal” that was based on understandings of virility as defined against homosexuality and the foreign. Letting the homosexual menace persist in any form or letting citizens present and future fall into

effeminacy threatened the post-revolutionary political and cultural projects authorities sought to enact. And yet, the central tension lay at the convergence of the national and transnational and between ideas that served the individual, the nation, or the universal. Homosexuality, as a prism, throws this convergence into clearer relief. Was Mexico's future one of productivity and useful, virile citizens? Or was it destined to be plagued by hermaphroditism, lost in battles internal and external on the levels of the individual body and the nation? The next chapter looks at the other side of the equation: what did homosexuals think of the virility debates, physical culture, state attempts to define them as criminal or ill, and efforts to reform or punish them? What about the homosexual social world made it such a threat for the nation and citizenship? Did homosexuals resist these efforts and/or were they complicit in them? And what alternative visions of Mexican identity, if any, did they articulate? Their story is the other side of the erotic revolutions.

Chapter 4: The Salted World: Socio-Cultural Histories of Homosexuality, 1920-1940

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated the importance of homosexuality to discourses of Mexican nationhood, citizenship, identity, and masculinity during the post-revolutionary period. I also showed how homosexuality revealed important condensation points between the nation and the universal. Virile citizenship was defined in large part against a homosexual other.

This chapter looks at a socio-cultural process that occurred concurrently with the entrenchment of homosexuality as a foreign “other” to Mexican citizenship: the expansion and post-revolutionary visibility of the *ambiente*. This social world—comprised of homosexual men and women, as well as sympathetic artists, intellectuals, bohemians and others—emerged larger and more cohesive than it had been in previous decades as part of the erotic revolution. Urban development, internal migration, and travel fostered homosexual cultures beyond what had existed before, opening up new opportunities for men to express identities, to meet others like themselves, and to seek out a “salted world” of social interactions and sex. Yet, due to the frequently hostile climate in which they lived, homosexuals also needed to fashion modes of survival to thwart efforts to remove them from the urban landscape.

Homosexual men were the most visible agents inhabitants of the *ambiente*, and this chapter describes how these men, throughout the social spectrum, expressed “dissident sexualities,” i.e. sexualities that by were inherently political because they were marked as anti-Mexican and anti-national by various actors. These sexualities challenged the attempts that many artists, journalists, politicians, jurists, and pundits made to codify a virile citizenship that was predicated on its juxtaposition with effeminacy—particularly that found in homosexuals—as a necessary foil. As part of the erotic revolution, their resistance exposed the anti-revolutionary tendencies at the core of post-Revolutionary politics and culture. While Carlos Monsiváis has argued that such sexualities were expressed only by a limited group of “gay” men in the

intelligentsia, I argue instead that whether expressed by a prominent public homosexual through poetry or by a man in drag in a working-class neighborhood, these dissident sexualities rejected attempts to solidify patriarchal heteronormativity as the foundation of Mexican society.

Challenging normativity is a political act and a part of survival in a homophobic culture, and dissident sexualities were also *perceived* as political by mainstream Mexican critics, precisely because they challenged the “natural” order of things. Dissident sexualities put homosexual men at the vanguard of Mexican modernity along with the modern girls—*las pelonas*—insofar as both groups were eager to adopt new fashions and ideologies, as well as envision an alternate Mexico to that being asserted by those advocating more traditional gender roles, regardless of their position on the political spectrum. In addition, the secular experiments in education, medicine, social engineering, politics, criminology, and culture initiated by various functionaries between 1920 and the end of Cárdenas’s *sexenio* brought forth issues of gender and sexuality into mainstream public life, a place they would remain thereafter. Homosexual men shaped the reborn nation, despite being scapegoated for local and national anxieties.

In the following chapter sections, I examine the *ambiente* and the lives of men from a variety of social positions through numerous sources including memoirs, interviews, letters, periodical articles, photographs, and criminal case files. These allow me to show intersections between queer lives and the development of physical culture as an individual and national form of development. Homosexual men’s visibility after 1920 was a harbinger of the “golden age” of homosexuality in the mid-twentieth century, and the *ambiente* flourished despite the homophobic debates and state interventions described in chapter 3. What is more, homosexuals expressed diverse means of being male, masculine, a citizen, and Mexican through friendships, everyday relationships, public discourse, social events, and sex, while also tweaking norms as

manufactured and *contested* rather than *natural*. Hosting a drag party, cruising in the streets, or wearing elaborate suits in the context of these debates were thus all political acts, insofar as they, after homosexual stereotypes had influenced public discourse already for decades, actively appropriated anti-Mexicanness as a key part of Mexican modernity.¹ Finally, it is important not to gloss over the challenges that homosexual men faced in the period. Thus, this chapter also offers the experiences of men who faced first hand the state's interventions from the men's perspectives and observers who, unexpectedly, saw them in a nuanced light rather than as the stereotypes they were made out to be. The resistance these men gave to the normative structures erected around them is a key, if forgotten, component to the *ambiente*'s survival and growth.

I. Physical Cultures, Athletic Homosexuals, and Contested Masculinity

As previously described, homosexuality was viewed as related to—and sometimes the same as—male effeminacy, weakness, and cowardice by those seeking to promote a vision of the masculine citizen. While there were many *afeminados* in Mexico City and other locations who expressed identities and behaviors that thwarted this vision and mainstream gender norms, there were also other men who queered masculinity as insiders within the cult of masculinity itself. These men frequented gymnasiums and sporting events, sought relationships in which gender roles were more ambiguous, and at times defined themselves in contrast to other types of homosexuals, particularly those who were deemed or self-defined as “effeminate.” Likewise, there were men who were labeled as *afeminados* who nevertheless proved themselves to be “ruffians” and dangerous to others, much to the surprise of others who expected homosexuals to

¹ This is not to say, however, that the actions of all homosexuals benefited the wider homosexual social world, as cases exist of activities damaging to the homosexual communities, as well as others around them. Pointing out these events is important to not simply advance a “victimhood” or oppression/repression argument that flattens the complexity of being homosexual in the period, but they should not be taken as the norm, as the majority of homosexuals—like other social groups—simply wanted find someone to connect with emotionally or sexually, and pursue what was meaningful to them.

be powerless and weak. This section serves as a foundation for exploring the alternative modes of being homosexual in order to complicate understandings of homosexuality as meaning or existing as *only* male effeminacy in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution. Through two sections on physical culture, its representation, and its reception, I argue that not only was the male body on display more frequently—and with less clothing—than one might assume, but that this culture was permeated with homosexuals from the start. These men saw an opportunity to fashion their own identities through physical culture, as well as to appropriate the masculine bodies on display in gyms, in the press, and in photographs or films for their own desires. Such identities and use of the male body undermined attempts to assert that masculine physical culture was unequivocally in opposition to homosexuals or would be understood universally as such; rather it showed homoerotic desire was interwoven into or enabled by physical culture, rather than squelched by it, leading opposing commentators to assert that virility, by virtue of being a male characteristic, must be ugly, rather than beautiful, an ultimately ineffective claim.

Splendid Physiques, Male Nudes, and Homoerotic Desires: Physical Cultures, 1920-1940

When photos of the physical training at Mexico City's YMCA ran in *Association Men's* July 1921 issue, the captions implored readers to observe the Mexican organization's success. "A Young Men's class any Association might well be proud of," stated one caption, its photo depicting lines of young men in gym uniforms exercising; other photos depicted students practicing a "wand-drill", a "Young Medics Pyramid", and the track team with their trophies. The photos were a proof of concept—YMCA ideals and programs had been exported to Mexico with the same results as those elsewhere. Mexicans were developing just as their counterparts to the north were, with physical development seen as a marker of national development.

Mexican leaders in several cities approved of the potential that YMCA team sports and

physical exercise could offer Mexico; as early as the turn of the century, new sports such as baseball, activities like hiking, and new technology had been associated with modernity.² By 1920, 1000 Mexico City boys were benefiting from the personal attention of Physical Director Enrique Aguirre, who led physical education courses in school curricula.³ In Monterrey, only the public square was large enough for the 6,000 boys that were put into the Association's physical instruction. Similarly in Chihuahua, leaders supported using a bullfighting ring as an athletic field where "the same crowds that formerly watched in the arena an exhibition of barbarism, now applaud the gymnastic drills and team games of hundreds of school children trained under Y leadership."⁴ Chihuahua Governor Enriques viewed YMCA leadership on the playgrounds as the "quickest way...to mould the future of the Mexican character."⁵

More importantly, the YMCA enjoyed the support of President Álvaro Obregón (1920-1924), as well as his successor Plutarco Calles (1924-1928), both Mexican revolutionary leaders who approved of the organization despite the Y's previous Porfirian and American ties.⁶ Writing in July 1921 in *Association Men* himself, Obregón stated that while most foreigners who went to Mexico went to get rich and exploit the people, he offered a "hearty welcome" to those who did good. The YMCA was chief among those, and stated the president, "I do want to tell you frankly that I welcome any institution which attempts to develop our national character on the basis of physical, intellectual, and moral education."⁷ For Obregón, a self-described "man of intensely national spirit" ready to die for Mexico's independence, some beneficial ideas knew no borders.

² William H. Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1987).

³ "One thousand Mexican High School Boys," *Association Men*, June 1920, 617.

⁴ "Physical," *Association Men*, June 1920, 635.

⁵ William L. Stidger, "Mexico Is 'Playing the Game,'" *Association Men*, December 1923, 188. Likewise, Tampico mayor Juan J. Lopez was pictured as an upstanding leader of the Tampico YMCA in *Association Men*. See page 159.

⁶ This may have been due to the organization's Protestant heritage, given the anti-clericalism of the period.

⁷ Alvaro Obregón, "Obregón's Hope for Mexico," *Association Men*, July 1921, 499.

He was sympathetic to the YMCA's work because the association sought to "better international relations and to sow doctrines of love and goodwill among all the social classes." Obregón promised to contribute substantially to the movement's expansion in Mexico. His support was crucial: it solidified the organization as an integral part of the Mexican social and cultural landscape. It also affirmed relations between the United States and Mexico.⁸ More importantly, it linked processes of national development with the international cultural phenomenon of physical culture, thereby further legitimating the discourses on the body, male beauty, hygiene, and athleticism that were circulating as part of the cult of virile citizenship described in the previous chapter and trying Mexico to an important "universal" to which it aspired.

Sport would continue to be linked with national and personal development for decades. No longer dominated by elite gentleman's clubs as they had been in the Porfirian period, athletics became democratized into Mexican culture as part of the sweeping educational changes that sought to advance the Revolution's aims.⁹ New programs sought to harness and shape the corporeal experiences of the population, with the intent of preparing it for physical work and better health, as well as "radically transforming it and transmitting moral values."¹⁰ In 1923, the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) created the Dirección de Educación Física, the Escuela Elemental de Educación Física was founded, and new stadiums were built to house athletic competitions.¹¹ In February 1923, a new journal—*Educación Física*—appeared, and it would

⁸ Perhaps this was part of improving relations after the disintegration of US-Mexico ties during the Carranza administration, with the YMCA acting as a proxy for the United States itself. Ironically, this process also signified an internationalization of the nation-building process and even an "Americanization" of it.

⁹ On Porfirian sporting cultures, see Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club*.

¹⁰ Mónica Lizbeth Chávez González, "Construcción de la nación y el género desde el cuerpo: La educación física en el México posrevolucionario," *Desacatos*, no. 30 (August 2009): 44.

¹¹ Schools for physical culture were opened in communities surrounding the capital as well. In 1925, authorities inaugurated the Escuela Popular de Cultura Física in Mixcoac with competitions and exhibitions by various athletic clubs, including the YMCA. See "Fue inaugurada la escuela popular de cultura física," *Excelsior*, February 11, 1925 sec. 2, 6. Interestingly, the most prominent community members mentioned were the women in attendance who had provided "exquisite" refreshments.

mirror its international counterparts *Association Men* and *Physical Culture* in offering articles on athletics and training methods for physical development.¹² It also published photographs showing men's progress. In the 1930s, physical culture projects continued, such as through the Beneficiencia Pública's use of sports as part of their structured daily activities that emphasized "discipline, responsibility, and productivity" and sought to develop the mind and body.¹³

In an important sense, then, the promotion of physical culture and bodily development was part of "restoring" the Mexican nation after its bloody Revolution. Much like the need to rebuild European nations at the end of World War I—a task that Ana Carden-Coyne has argued occurred in part through the development of men's muscular fitness—Mexico sought to develop a "new man." Bodies mattered in post-revolutionary Mexico, particularly as cults developed around Obregón's arm—lost in battle against Pancho Villa and preserved in a formaldehyde jar—and his body following his assassination in 1928.¹⁴ Thus, the emphasis on physical culture, which survived multiple presidents and changes in administration, makes sense: it was a way of unifying the pieces of the nation back into a whole around a central goal of virile development, and it targeted youths (future citizens) and young men in order to effect these changes.¹⁵ It also was critical in creating a "muscular identity." As Carden-Coyne wrote,

¹² See *Educación Física*, starting in February 1923. Mexicans had discussed the virtues of physical education as part of scientific hygiene already during the nineteenth century. See, for example, Federico de la Vega, "Dialogos científicos," *La Familia*, January 12, 1884. The article appeared as positivist ideologies were sweeping through Mexican discourse and government.

¹³ Enrique Ochoa, "Coercion, Reform, and the Welfare State: The Campaign against 'Begging' in Mexico City during the 1930s," *The Americas* 58, no. 1 (July 2001): 54.

¹⁴ On the cults surrounding Obregón's body and arm, see Jürgen Buchenau, *The Last Caudillo: Álvaro Obregón and the Mexican Revolution* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2011). The "bodies of public men" had been important in the Mexican public sphere decades before Obregón; as Pablo Piccato has argued, oratory allowed "Mexican publics to admire and praise" the men's bodies, and it allowed the orators to express a full range of emotions, including those considered "feminine" in public. See Pablo Piccato, *The Tyranny of Opinion: Honor in the Construction of the Mexican Public Sphere* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 116.

¹⁵ For examples occurring outside the capital sponsored by business and government, see Gregory Swedberg, "Dangerous Women and Macho Men: Preserving Sexual Difference in Orizaba, Mexico, 1920-1940" (Doctoral Dissertation, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, 2007), 197.

With reconstructive intention, the bodybuilding industry displayed the modern masculine self through the performance of every flex and release. Showcasing biceps and forearms, photography delivered hyperbolic messages of glamorous strength and forceful virility. The sexualization of muscles entwined the social task of postwar rehabilitation with the fashioning of the most intimate of subjectivities...Muscles became markers of men's rehabilitation and civilian reintegration, showing that the fragmented male subject had been restored from pieces to whole.¹⁶

Such reconstruction was also part of the way in which Mexico presented itself in international forums. For example, as Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo has written, the Mexican pavilion in the 1929 World's Fair in Seville, Spain, was divided into two halves—the feminine and masculine, each with specific traits, with “superior” traits ascribed to men. These “condensed a relatively complete image of a revolutionary, more or less populist, modern, and virile Mexico.”¹⁷

The press also helped spread physical culture and its appreciation through increased coverage of athletics following the Revolution. *El Heraldo* reported in October 1920 that “diverse associations open their Gymnasiums night after night, and a great number of members, lovers of muscular development, attend with astonishing regularity.”¹⁸ On Sundays, the sporting fields were ablaze with the multicolor uniforms of sporting teams. Happy children swooped and swerved through the city's parks on skates. In June 1924, several sports articles appeared in *El Demócrata* under the title “El cultivo del músculo” (“the cultivation of muscles”). Readers could peruse accounts of sporting events in Tampico, as well as the experiences of the Mexican Olympic contingent in Paris, France. Other articles focused on boxing, and photos and drawings of foreign boxing stars, including US American Tom Gibbons, Frenchman George Carpentier (who had lost to Gibbons), and Filipino Francisco Guilledo, known as “Pancho Villa”

¹⁶ Ana Carden-Coyne, “From Pieces to Whole: The Sexualization of Muscles in Postwar Bodybuilding,” in *Body Parts: Critical Explorations in Corporeality*, ed. Christopher Forth and Ivan Crozier (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 207-208. She also notes, “Crucial for masculinity in this period was the way in which the Western tradition of muscular identity became a quest for agency and social acceptance, through this sexualized subjectivity.”

¹⁷ Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 231.

¹⁸ Salvador Esperón, “Los patines,” *El Heraldo*, October 25, 1920, 9.

accompanied them.¹⁹ Boxing, which could be enjoyed by people from all social backgrounds for its portrayal of virile masculinity, rapidly became popular and a fixture on Mexican sports pages in publications across the political spectrum.²⁰ *Excelsior* even hosted a boxing competition in September 1925, printing contestants' images in their pages.²¹ By participating in the culture, men might reasonably expect that bodily development would gain them interest from attractive women, who would laud them for their muscles and affirm the heteronormative order.²²

Yet, physical cultures also attracted homosexuals, both as spectators and participants, as muscles had become, in Carden-Coyne's terms, "sexualized." And, as John Donald Gustav-Wrathall observed in his study of the US YMCA, "though homosexuality was stigmatized, physical culture generally gave men permission to focus their attention on other men's bodies."²³ Physical culture, in other words, allowed men to look at other men directly in publicly accepted ways that tied into larger discourses of personal and national development. Men also had "permission" to admire each other's hard work and physical form, as well as to be in close proximity to each other in spaces created specifically as shrines to male athleticism. In such an environment, homosocial admiration could blur into homoerotic appreciation and interest.

Consider Elias Nandino, whose encounter with Francisco Sánchez at the YMCA opened

¹⁹ "El cultivo del musculo," *El Democrata*, June 8, 1924. Interest in foreign boxers frequently appeared in publications, especially when the boxers came for bouts in Mexico itself. See Richard V. McGehee, "The Dandy and the Mauler in Mexico: Johnson, Dempsey, et al., and the Mexico City Press, 1919-1927," *The Journal of Sport History* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 20-33.

²⁰ There are copious examples. See for example "Los as altos de box del sábado," *Excelsior*, August 11, 1924, 4. As noted in the previous chapter, columnists would advise parents that boxing was a valuable skill for a boy to learn, as it was related to defending his masculinity and honor. On the development and impact of imported sports on Mexico and Central America, see Richard V. McGehee, "The Impact of Imported Sports on the Popular Culture of Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Mexico and Central America," in *Strange Pilgrimages: Exile, Travel, and National Identity in Latin America, 1800-1990s*, ed. Ingrid E. Fey and Karen Racine (Wilmington, DE: Jaguar Books, a Scholarly Resources Inc. Imprint, 2000).

²¹ "Torneos de box de Excelsior," *Excelsior*, September 12, 1925.

²² "Encuentro atletico del club deportivo," *Excelsior*, August 12, 1924, sec. 2, 6.

²³ John Donald Gustav-Wrathall, *Take the Young Stranger by the Hand* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 146.

Section II. Unlike his friend Salvador Novo, who eschewed athletics despite being well suited for them, Nandino eagerly participated in multiple aspects of physical culture.²⁴ Comparing himself to his friend among the Contemporáneos—who were stereotypes as effeminate—Nandino expressed his love of the outdoors and being physical: “I was a strong boy, they were rickety, *hombrecitos en su casa*, weaklings. I also loved to swim, but they didn’t, they were distinct.”²⁵ Athletics, thus, offered Nandino new ways of making friends and lovers. A pair of photos shows the aspiring doctor as part of a group of over two dozen medical students during an athletic competition in 1923, the same year the twenty-three year-old Nandino had joined the school. In one, the young men are lined up side-by-side, perhaps in preparation for a race. In the other, the men are relaxed, with some standing and others reclining against each other. All are athletic, lean and muscular, and most are wearing athletic uniforms.²⁶ In the young men’s casual masculinity, a viewer can see the developmentalist model impact on men, as several of the men sport “cultivated” muscles, while others show a lithe, “terpsichorean” look popular in the period.²⁷

²⁴ Salvador Novo, *La estatua de sal* (Mexico: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1998), 98.

²⁵ Gonzalo Valdés Medellín and Elías Nandino, “Soy un santo laico,” in *De dolores y placeres: Entrevistas Elías Nandino entre 1954 y 1993* (Mexico, D.F.: Secretaría de Cultura del Gobierno del Distrito Federal, 2009), 120. The article was originally published in “Sábado,” the cultural supplement of *Unomásuno*, December 22, 1984, 15. The phrase *hombres en su casa* is a difficult one to translate, but it refers to “little men”, i.e. not complete men, who never needed to work, even at their own home.

²⁶ See the non-paginated photo gallery at the back of the first edition of Enrique Aguilar, *Elías Nandino: una vida no/velada* (Mexico: Editorial Grijalbo), 1986. This was not reprinted in the second edition, perhaps because it appeared after a falling out between Aguilar and Nandino over the book’s publication. Similar photos appeared over and over in the Mexican press: A photo of the YMCA basketball team in March 1930 shows similar intimacy; even though they had lost, the young men smile and wrap their arms around each other and their coach. See “Brillante juego de basket en la Asociacion,” *Excelsior*, March 1, 1930, 8. A February 1935 photograph of a military rugby (*rugbi*) team—saved among other images of men in Salvador Novo’s personal archive and depicting men he knew—also shows men leaning on each other, although not as much as in the earlier photos. The photo is dated 5-2-935, which I am reading as February 2, 1935 given the normal order of dates in Mexico. It can be found in CEHM, Archivo Salvador Novo, Fondo Antonio López Mancera, Caja 15.

²⁷ Terpsichorean bodies were those that were slender and less bulgingly muscular, although clearly still athletic. See David L. Chapman and Brett Josef Grubisic, *American Hunks: the Muscular Male Body in Popular Culture, 1860-1970* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2009), 123. The Mexican press on more than one occasion labeled homosexual gatherings as related to Terpsichore, which is not to say the image itself shows a group of homosexual men, but to point to the circulation of the term transnationally. Nandino himself liked the look on men. The same look can be seen in athletes posing from the group Deportivo Internacional after their victory over competitors from the YMCA and Equipo Yaqui in February 1925. See *Excelsior*, February 9, 1925, Toros y deportes section, 2.

At the core of much physical culture—particularly that which occurred in group settings—was the creation of intimate homosocial bonds between men. These restored and replaced those other homosocial forms broken at the end of the nineteenth century. In the second image, this intimacy can be seen, as the men show affection for and camaraderie with each other, some placing hands on each other or around a colleague. The man to Nandino's right, for example, has his arm draped around the other's shoulders. Unfortunately, at this far remove, we cannot ask the men if they knew of Nandino's sexual interests, what their reactions to them would be, or if any of them shared them. And, we cannot assume that the interactions between the men depicted in the photo had more than platonic underpinnings. That said, homosexual men participated in these environments, and it is reasonable to question where the line between friendly competition or admiration and more amorous interest lay, particularly as physical culture exposed men's bodies in more intimate and dramatic ways than had previously occurred.

As the opening of Section II indicated, Nandino found athletic facilities conducive to meeting other men. Another example: in 1928, a twenty-eight year-old Nandino went swimming in the pool of a secondary school on the premises of the Ex-covento de San Pedro y San Pablo, located at the corner of San Ildefonso and the Correo Mayor. Like he had at the YMCA, Nandino cruised at the pool, taking in the "multitude of ephebes that swarmed there."²⁸ After a time, he noticed "a real modern Adonis" who "swam marvelously," was sixteen, and who was "perfection in-the-flesh." After playfully attracting the youth's attention—and a day later chatting him up while gazing at his nude body in the locker-room—Nandino was smitten and soon, the two

²⁸ Casasola took a photo of a public pool in 1924 that offers a glimpse of what Nandino saw: the pool's edge is literally lined with men in shorts, underwear, and swim trunks, all shirtless and many showing off lean or partially developed forms. Above is a gallery in which men in suits, hats, and other clothing observe those who swim. See Casasola, Inventario 108764, "Bañistas en la Alberca Pane durante el día de San Juan," Silver Gelatin Print, ca. 1924, in Pablo Ortiz Monasterio, *Mirada y memoria: Archivo fotográfico Casasola México: 1900-1940* (Madrid: Editorial Océano / Turner, 2002), 132-133.

became friends. Eventually, after a falling-out—in which “Adonis” punched Nandino for kissing him—and a year spent apart, they started up a relationship, had passionate sex and fell in love and then out again once the Adonis became more hirsute.²⁹ What attracted Nandino to “Adonis” was complicated; he at once privileged the other’s smooth, ephebe-like qualities while also finding the youth’s interest in women—a sign of his masculine status as a “real man”—attractive. Yet it was Nandino who usually was the top in the relationship, contrary to what might be expected between a self-acknowledged homosexual who pursued an athletic youth.

In light of Nandino’s presence—and the existence of others like Sánchez and Adonis—among the groups portrayed in the photos and within the physical culture, another caption on the YMCA photos that appeared in July 1921 seems all the more pregnant with homoerotic possibility: “Note their splendid physiques and the manly bearing of our Southern neighbors.”³⁰ On the surface, it would be easy to read the caption as applauding the physical development of Mexican men into the sort of virile citizens that both the nation and the YMCA sought. However, one wonders if all those who saw the images consumed them in that manner or if instead such images served as portable copies of the male form that could end up in the hands of homosexual men; surely men with queer sensibilities, after all, did take note of the “splendid physiques.”

Photographs offered another means of disseminating physical culture, and photos of men posing and demonstrating their muscles—with similarly effusive captions—as well as articles describing the athletic achievements of young men—including detailed measurements of their bodies—appeared frequently in YMCA publications like *Association Men* and in *Educación Física*. Such images and information were offered as models for other young men’s own

²⁹ Elías Nandino, *Juntando mis pasos* (México, D.F.: Editorial Aldus, 2000), 87-88.

³⁰ “Physical Training in the City of Mexico,” *Association Men*, July 1921, 507.

personal development.³¹ That was the intent of the image of the athletic José Gómez, who grew up in the Mexico City Uai and would move to Tampico as physical director. Gómez was “no quitter” and overcame challenges in order to achieve his own personal and physical success.³² The Mexican popular press also engaged in the dissemination of details about the male body, such as in an *Excelsior* article on Finnish runner Paavo Nurmi, who was considered “the most perfect athlete of current runners.” The article included measurements of his limbs and body, as well as a sketch drawing.³³ Such details were part and parcel of the physical culture. What is more, individuals could take their own photographs and were encouraged to do by ads appearing in periodicals for Kodak cameras, which meant that like the exercises and sports themselves, the images could be “democratized” because more and more people could take their own.³⁴

The participation of homosexuals in physical cultures—and in the construction of the “ideal” in terms of masculine appearance—undermined efforts of legitimizing homosocial intimacy as only that and not a relationship pregnant with homoerotic possibility. Photos and bodily details—not to mention the athletic events themselves—allowed men to revel in the specifics of other men’s bodies, whether alone or homosocially with other men. The line between admiration and homoerotic desire could thus be blurred, and assertions of “national virility” were queered by a focus on masculine beauty, a concern that appear that would appear throughout the period and culminate in attempts to claim that virility and masculinity were not beautiful, but

³¹ Photographs also offered portable proof of the progress of individuals and association branches; by seeing the young men in their classes or posing with their muscles in view, Association members throughout the world could see the progress of individual associations.

³² Richard Williamson, “Gomez Was No Quitter,” *Association Men*, April 1923, 368. Williamson, who had been the secretary of the Mexican organization himself, gushed about Gomez and his passion for both athletics and Christian morality, as expressed in both work and play.

³³ “Paavo Nurmi es considerado como el atleta mas perfecto de los corredores actuales,” *Excelsior*, February 9, 1925, Toros y Deportes section, 3.

³⁴ See the multiple ads for Kodak in *Excelsior*, August 10, 1924, including local sites for film developing and the purchase of new products.

instead, were necessarily ugly because they were qualities of men.

Fragments of a Photographic Culture: Queerly Consuming the Visible Male Body and Nudes

The same year as he met his young Adonis, Nandino went to Los Angeles to work on his thesis and learn about new medical advances. There he met the famous Mexican actor and Hollywood heartthrob Ramón Novarro, the star of the silent film *Ben-Hur* (1925). Nandino recalled Novarro as very effeminate in person, a claim that is both revealing of his own interest in staking out a masculine identity and the success that Novarro had in “playing straight” while on screen.³⁵

Indeed, in November 1926, *CROM*, the mouthpiece of the powerful Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana and the same magazine that had lampooned dandies and the “third sex” only a year before in cartoons, applauded Novarro’s turn as Ben-Hur:

Before this film, it is certain that Novarro had worked with gusto in more or less secondary and even leading roles, but always he appeared to us as someone affected, a little effeminate and unpleasant; but now we see him emerging as masculine, great and genial in his character of Judá, Prince of the House of Ben Hur.³⁶

The comment is astonishing because, for all intents and purposes, Novarro was a member of the *ambiente* and interested in men.³⁷ What is more, as Nandino recalled, he was more effeminate than his character Ben Hur, and Novarro had good reason to believe that “he lacked a strong virile image, for his delicate features, slight stature, and mild manner” which “could be—and sometimes were—perceive[d] as effeminate.” Novarro even worried about appearing as a “sis.”³⁸ A photo of a young Novarro in the 1920s does show him with the same slicked hair and well-fitting suit that the Contemporáneos wore; such a look was part of the “effeminate” bearing to

³⁵ Valdés Medellín and Nandino, “Soy un santo laico,” 121. Novarro, for his part, allegedly felt that Nandino should become a star and introduced him to studio officials. However, Xavier VillaurrutiaVillaurrutia, a Nandino’s good friend, dissuaded him and told him he should return to Mexico and complete his previous goals.

³⁶ Álvaro Tonio, “Cines: Crónicas de los mejores estrenos,” *CROM*, November 15, 1926, 40.

³⁷ Rumor has it that he apparently refused MGM studio directives to get married to deflect rumors of his sexuality. However, not all took kindly to his queer identity, as in 1968, he was the victim of a heinous, homophobic murder at the hands of two brothers who he had hired for sex.

³⁸ André Soares, *Beyond Paradise: The Life of Ramón Novarro* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002), 18.

which both Nandino and CROM referred. How ironic that he would become one of Mexico's best known male leads in the 1920s–1930s and was still the talk of the town years later.

Novarro's success at passing as virile and masculine—a key aspect of his status as Hollywood heartthrob—was due to his adoption, whether by choice or at the behest of the Hollywood studios, of the well-developed form of a physical culture aficionado. Although more “Terpsichorean” than muscle-bound, he nevertheless could pull off more physically demanding and imposing roles. Numerous photos showed off his body. For example, a physique photo appearing on March 3, 1930 in *Excelsior* depicted him in a sleeveless shirt and shorts, holding two barbells over his shoulders, flexing his arms and showing off his biceps after “six weeks of rest in the German capital.”³⁹ The athletic pose mirrored those taken of other men as part of the burgeoning academic physique photography industry.⁴⁰ He appeared in many other photos that showed off his physical form, including one in which he wore a tank-top and shorts and was rowing, another of him dramatically lit (again in a tank-top), two by George Hurrell in 1928—shirtless and straddling a pommel horse and shirtless on a row machine—and another of him shirtless and in shorts, staring at what appears to be a body of water as part of his role for Ben Hur. Given his popularity as a cinema star, it is likely that Novarro was an idol for young Mexican men interested in his role as an athletic swashbuckler and heartthrob, while also serving as a pinup for queer men. Indeed, one gets the sense that Nandino's comments about the actor stemmed from disappointment that he was not as masculine as he appeared.

Many of these photos circulated to his fans on both sides of the border and worldwide in the form of postcards and portraits. Even the movie poster for Ben Hur showed him shirtless

³⁹ “Ramon Novarro,” *Excelsior*, March 3, 1930, sec. 3, 5. This photo likely was taken as part of his work with MGM, as other photos of him in a similar outfit and barbells exist.

⁴⁰ Thomas Waugh, *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from Their Beginnings to Stonewall* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). See especially chapter 3, “Strength and Stealth.”

while on his chariot.⁴¹ Other photos depicted Novarro as a debonair gentleman, including a side-profile that showed him as a slick-haired dandy. His photos thus depict him straddling two worlds: that of the aristocratic gentleman, and more importantly, that of physical culture. Yet, by cultivating an athletic public persona, he also engaged in the representation and promotion of an alternative form of queerness based on masculine body form, rather than on gender transgression like those *afeminados* who cross-dressed. In other words, he showcased a form of *masculine* queer presentation. His subject position, then, raises the possibility that his contemporaries in the YMCA and military academy also were straddling two worlds and participating in a physical culture that included significant queer elements. Photos in Salvador Novo's private collection of his lovers and friends speak to that reality: many of the handsome young men were athletic students at the military academy, and in some photographs, men are shown grappling with each other mostly nude in order to exhibit their forms. A few are clearly marked as "*novio de Novo*," Novo's boyfriend; one shows a young man posing with in his tight swimsuit, his athletic body lit by the sun on a beach. The photographs' audience was a queer man—Novo—if not a larger community of men among whom were other homosexuals, and such photos demonstrate the potential for male bodies in pictorial form to be collected by homosexual men during the 1930s, as well as offered to them by their counterparts who were not necessarily queer themselves.⁴²

For his part, Novarro also appeared mostly nude in at least one photo, taken for *Ben Hur* and circulated internationally, that depicts him leaning back and staring to the left of the frame, the shadow creeping up his legs to obscure everything from his lower stomach down. In contrast to his physique photos, this photo has a more aesthetic flair, reminiscent of academic art photos

⁴¹ Chapman and Grubisic, *American Hunks*, 128-129.

⁴² These photos are also found among Salvador Novo's personal papers at CEHM, Archivo Salvador Novo, Fondo Antonio López Mancera, Caja 15.

that were a means of disseminating male nudes. The controlled quality of Novarro's photo contrasts with another nude photo of a famous Mexican actor. Pedro Infante, the famed actor of Mexico's "golden age" of cinema was photographed taking a shower in 1939, and unlike Novarro's photo, Infante is shown in an impromptu moment with full-frontal nudity, his body and family jewels barely obscured by soap suds.⁴³

These images are remarkable, given the alleged taboo of the nude male form in Mexico and the de-eroticizing of male nudes that appeared in public art, such as by muralists like Diego Rivera.⁴⁴ Yet, the images are not alone. Nude drawings of men appeared in multiple advertisements in the period, such as for "Fuerza," a cordial that stimulated, toned, and invigorated the functions of the body, including revitalizing sexual debility, and for the "Oliver Latina 13" typewriter, a "model of resistance and service" that was curiously marketed with a nude male shoveling coal in the background.⁴⁵ One wonders just who the audience was for such a typewriter, given the image. More strikingly, Mexican photographer Luis Márquez Romay, who was famous for his photos of everyday life in Mexico, also took photos of male nudes between 1926 and 1932 in Mexico City.⁴⁶ In many of the photos, the youthful men are posed in classical motifs referencing ancient Greece and Rome, showing Márquez Romay's knowledge of and participation in a transnational photographic culture dating back into the nineteenth century

⁴³ I owe the reference to this photo to Sergio de la Mora who discusses the homoeroticism of Pedro Infante in his book *Cinemachismo*, particularly chapter 2. See Sergio de la Mora, *Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006). Infante, like Novarro, routinely appeared in photos and films stripped to the waist, showing off his masculine, cultivated form throughout the mid twentieth century.

⁴⁴ See *Ibid.*, viii.; see also Rudi Bleys, *Images of Ambiente: Homotextuality and Latin American Art, 1810-Today* (London: Continuum, 2000), 62.

⁴⁵ See the ads in *Excelsior*, September 12, 1925, 4 and September 16, 1925, sec. 5, 8, respectively. Perhaps they sought to capitalize on the image of the virile proletarian worker by suggesting that using their machine would help a clerk make a similar manly contribution.

⁴⁶ Romay's photographs were uncovered unexpectedly during a restoration project and published in Luis Márquez Romay, *Desnudos 1926-1932: Fotografías de Luis Márquez Romay*, ed. Roxana Velásquez Martínez del Campo and María Teresa Uriarte (Mexico, D.F.: UNAM, 2006). Little seems to be known about who the models themselves were; although members of the LGBTQ community in Mexico note that Romay's interest in photographing them was related to his own interests.

that included noted photographers like Wilhelm von Gloeden, Guglielmo Plüschow, Edwin Townsend, Thomas Eakins, George Platt Lynes, and many others.⁴⁷ Other photos are studies of the body form against more neutral backgrounds, again referencing the fine-art physique photos circulating transnationally. While the young men in the photos are slim and not body-builders, they nevertheless exhibit lean, athletic body forms. Given these bodies, it is also reasonable to suspect that these models had been influenced by the burgeoning physical culture of the time.

Did such images circulate? Marquéz Romay's male nudes were unknown to scholars for decades, and research has yet to identify when—or if—they circulated. However, Deborah Dorotinsky and Laura González speculated in 2005 that the photos might have been made for the artist's own private contemplation, as a commission for someone else, or for discrete and limited circulation among artistic circles. Importantly, the authors also note that the “homoerotic look” of the photos “insinuates a possible consumption by a homosexual public,” one particularly disposed to the images artistic presentation.⁴⁸ Novo's collection of images offers support that such a market existed, if only informally. It is reasonable, then, to suspect that some images were shared and that such traces have yet to be found or have been lost due to the purging—by disapproving families or archivists—common to materials that have queer themes.⁴⁹

Mexicans who were members of the YMCA also came into contact with semi-nude and

⁴⁷ For an excellent introduction to male nude photography, see David Leddick, *The Male Nude* (Köln, Germany: Taschen, 1998). Romay focused on less boyish males than some of his contemporaries, although the men are still young and athletic.

⁴⁸ Deborah Dorotinsky and Laura González, “Las máscaras de Eros,” in *Desnudos 1926-1932: Fotografías de Luis Márquez Romay*, ed. Roxana Velásquez Martínez del Campo and María Teresa Uriarte (Mexico, D.F.: Museo Nacional de Arte, Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, UNAM, 2006), 25-26. Such consumption was risky, as photos fell under the purview of Penal Code statutes about “moral outrages”, but case files suggest that smut peddlers did indeed incorporate male nudes in their offerings to potential customers. Further forgotten caches of photos like those of Marquéz Romay may still be extant and waiting to be found.

⁴⁹ Mexican research Rodrigo Laguarda, when consulted about this chapter, noted that although he had tried to find men who had queer experiences during the first half of the twentieth century, either such men could not be found or they would not talk, choosing to protect their families or legacies.

nude photos of men, which were common in association publications.⁵⁰ In 1922, *Association Men* ran a photograph depicting a lineup of men in a Lincoln, Nebraska examination room, in which two men inspected members' naked bodies, which were visible to the camera from behind.⁵¹ Such examinations were routine aspects of being inducted into the association, and demonstrated the body-centered intimacy between association secretaries and instructors and their students. Similar physical examinations were made routine in the Mexico City organization, bringing the bodies of young men under professional scrutiny that mirrored, without the penal consequences, the evaluations conducted in the Mexican prison system and the youth tribunals by the 1930s.⁵² In addition, ads in Association publications showcased young male bodies through drawings of them enjoying locker rooms, smiling under showers, and relishing hot water and fluffy towels.⁵³ Hygiene, athleticism, and sport were thus combined with pleasure and the beauty of the semi or fully nude male form; such images were the contemporaries of those produced by Marquéz Romay and of Novarro, as well as the antecedents of Infante's images.

At least one nude YMCA photo was taken in Mexico itself. The photo, found in a 1937 report on the progress of the Chihuahua (city) branch, detailed the interior of the YMCA locker room. Along the walls were benches and wooden cabinets for the men's clothing and personal effects. A scale was in a corner, waiting for a man to step on in order to measure his progress.

The most striking aspect of the photo was the rear-view of two naked young men, framed by the

⁵⁰ At least in the United States and London, many YMCA swimming pools were nude-only. Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London : Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 97. Houlbrook reports his sources as saying that swimming trunks were unhygienic; hence, nudity was encouraged. Chauncey describes the same "hygienic" nude swimming occurring in New York. See *Gay New York*, 156. In Mexico, it appears at least in the 1920s that suits were used, as Nandino's memoirs and a small photograph of a swimming primer show. This might mark an important cultural difference between Mexico and the other examples, but without Mexican sources, it is hard to do more than speculate.

⁵¹ Gustav-Wrathall, *Take the Young Stranger by the Hand*, 35.

⁵² "One thousand Mexican High School Boys," 617.

⁵³ These can be found frequently through *Association Men* in the 1910s and 1920s in nearly every issue. Similar ads would appear in mainstream Mexican newspapers by at least the 1940s. See Chapter [].

shower room doorway, staring back over their shoulders at the camera, the YMCA triangle logo clearly visible behind them.⁵⁴ Unfortunately, no evidence is given on the photo's purpose.

Yet, by 1937, the international organization had been involved in a number of scandals involving homosexuality, and rumors of at least one preoccupied Association officials in Mexico City in the early 1920s.⁵⁵ Gustav-Wrathall has argued that great ambiguity characterized the YMCA's response to allegations of homosexuality, as well as their response to cruising in their facilities. Such ambiguity was due in part to understaffing, which hindered surveillance, as well as the presence of either queer staffers or those who were so sympathetic to cruising that they directed men to different rooms based on an assessment of their openness to queer activity.⁵⁶ Indeed, "in pretending not to know what was going on, YMCA building managements helped create the aura of ambiguity that is one of the central elements of most public cruising scenes."⁵⁷

In light of the potential for "immoral" activity in the Mexican organization and the reality that the YMCA elsewhere had been both implicated in homosexual scandals and was a site for queer interactions, how could the Chihuahua photo not have raised the possibility of appropriation by a member of the *ambiente*? How could anyone possessing the photo not be suspect of desiring too much from other young men? Perhaps the photo even had a queer sensibility behind their taking. Regardless, the photo does raise a few relevant issues. First, the young men were willing to pose nude together; this suggests that for them, such a photo would not automatically be queer or they were unconcerned about such a reading. Second, the photo

⁵⁴ "Report of A. W. Hansen on Chihuahua," August 31, 1937, Mexico, KFYA. This photo itself may not have been disseminated publicly in Mexico, but its existence was known to Mexicans, including the two photographed for the photo, the photographer, and most likely, some members of the Chihuahua organization.

⁵⁵ See "Williamson to Babcock," September 29, 1921, Mexico, KFYA. The potential scandal involved associates charged with immorality with their students, and Williamson admitted that while he felt the men in question were not leading "double lives" that it was entirely possible that they "had made a slip sometime" during their life. Intimacy and proximity in the masculine homosocial environment were thus potential threats to heteronormativity.

⁵⁶ Gustav-Wrathall, *Take the Young Stranger by the Hand*, 170.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 172.

was stamped with a local photographer or developer's mark, meaning that someone other than the YMCA had used the negative who was agreeable to images of nude men. Third, the two men were not needed to demonstrate the locker-room's modernity nor its amenities; their presence seems superfluous unless the intent was to showcase the male form and tap into transnational physical cultures tropes. Thus, while not artistic like those taken by Marquéz Romy, the photos appearing of Mexico City's gym classes in *Association Men* and the Chihuahua nude, though presumably intended as wholesome representations of YMCA life, nevertheless offered homoerotic and queer opportunities for men. The images also point to a greater tolerance to male nudity than has previously been described for Mexico, particularly so early in the century.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, photos and images of the male body littered Mexican periodicals and circulated between Mexican men. Public representations of the male body in Mexican culture had been made safe by physical culture, so that shirtless, sweaty photos of boxers appeared in major dailies for the consumption by avid fans. Similarly, photos of swimmers appeared clad minimally, at times only in Speedos, also appeared. Rather than being something that would be hidden from view—as the received view has asserted—the male body was part of the erotic revolution in sex/gender norms underway at the time. Looking at and observing other men was part of cruising cultures, whether in Mexico or elsewhere. And the publicity circulating male bodies—from ads to photographs to actual displays—made the possibility that men would be gazed at all the more likely, thereby increasing the chances that an individual would be cruised or even inducted into the homosexual social sphere.

II. Transnational Universals: Virility, Desire, and the Contemporáneos

Not all homosexuals showed as much enthusiasm for participating in athletics as Nandino.

Salvador Novo as teenager was a student of reformer Moisés Sáenz—a great proponent of

physical education—and he went running a few times, after which he would stop at the YMCA for breakfast. Although encouraged to develop into an athlete due to his tall height, Novo opted out of athletic competitions due to the rewards that Sáenz bestowed upon well-performing students who as “leaders” could be exempt from “sweaty athletic exercises.” Novo confessed that this suited him, as he was lazy and possessed “a neurotic shame of showing [himself] nude” among the other young men, as was common in the locker rooms of the school and Uai.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, Novo did appreciate the male form, as did other Contemporáneos and their friends. In 1927, Novo visited Hawaii as part of the Mexican delegation to the Pan-Pacific conference and a representative of the Secretaría de Educación (SEP). In an interview, he positioned himself as a thoughtful patriot when stereotypes of Mexico as a “land populated exclusively by bandits, señoritas and unscrupulous politicians” were posed to him:

Naturally it is somewhat discouraging to encounter now and then such public questions as ‘Is Mexico worthwhile?’ or ‘what about Mexico?’...And quite as naturally there is not a doubt in the mind of any Mexican, be he thinker or peon but what his native country is tremendously ‘worthwhile’ and that its difficult problems will be solved ultimately.⁵⁹

Novo’s critics among various literary and political circles in Mexico might not have expected such a declaration from him—the irony is that he was defending *la patria* as they were assailing him and other Contemporáneos at home—but his other antics in Hawaii, as captured the prose essay *Return Ticket*, were of a decidedly less patriotic bent. At one point, he described the handsome, dark, “sun-toasted” beach boys, one of whom tried to teach him to swim—a skill, he was unable to master. The scene is rife with homoeroticism, as he described watching his instructor shuck his brightly colored swimsuits for “another, white bathing suit of his own flesh” staying “naked, day and night on the beach” playing the ukulele along with others of his kind;

⁵⁸ Novo, *La estatua de sal*, 98. These would be “signs” of his unfitness to be a “new man.” See Chapter 3.

⁵⁹ The quote is from an unnamed Honolulu, Hawaii newspaper from April 12, 1927. See CEHM, Archivo Salvador Novo, Fondo Antonio López Mancera, Caja 11, Folder 2.

the boys were so pleasing that American women wrote love letters to them. “If I was a writer,” Novo slyly quipped, “I would meditate on the life of these boys, mythological beings, product of the sea.” As if he were not already. Unfortunately for him, the boys’ notoriety—and the recognition of where that might lead—prompted a sign on the hotel elevator: “Under No Circumstances Whatsoever Will Beach Boys Be Allowed into Guest-Rooms.”⁶⁰

Seamen Rhymes and Virile Homosexuality

In 1934, a year in which the Contemporáneos and Novo himself came under significant attack in various publications, Novo published one hundred copies of his poetry collection *Seamen Rhymes* while in Buenos Aires. The work came during another trip Novo took on behalf of the SEP, beginning in 1933. In the Argentine capital, Novo met Federico García Lorca, who he admired and who would exert a lasting influence on his life. At their meeting, Novo was in García Lorca’s bedroom with other admirers, and the scene was decidedly homoerotic: at first the poet was in bed in pajamas, then he took a bath, then he came and went, all the while conversing. As Novo recalled, “little by little I noticed that he was talking directly to me; that all those illustrious admirers of him were fancying him, and at the same time making me uneasy, and that I should wait for them to leave, and then he and I would have a true embrace.”⁶¹

When the men met more intimately, Novo mentioned García Lorca’s “Oda a Walt Whitman,” which had been first published in August 1933 by the Mexico City private press Alcancía at the behest of several Mexican intellectuals. The text was a limited edition and was “closeted” insofar as it circulated only among the intellectuals who used it as an “ideological

⁶⁰ Salvador Novo, “Return Ticket,” *Ulises* 1, no. 4 (October 1927): 23-24.

⁶¹ Salvador A Oropesa, *The Contemporáneos Group: Rewriting Mexico in the Thirties and Forties*, 1st ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 38-39. Oropesa translated the text from Novo’s *Continente vacío* (1935), 198-199.

validation of the gay way of life.”⁶² The poem itself—which described homosexuality in virile, positive terms much like Walt Whitman’s own writings—had a lasting impact on the Mexicans, including Novo, as well as men like Edmundo O’Gorman and Justino Fernández, the publishers.⁶³ As John K. Walsh has noted, “there is reason to believe that they took on the project as a kind of private anthem for a small and elitist liberal circle with strong social sympathies toward homosexuals, or even—though this would veer from Lorca’s gesture—as apologia for a discreet or ennobled coterie.”⁶⁴ Homosexual artist Manuel Rodríguez Lozano, a member of the Contemporáneos, illustrated the cover, which shows two young men sitting nude together.⁶⁵

The meeting between Novo and García Lorca produced *Seamen Rhymes*, which the latter illustrated with surreal images of sailors.⁶⁶ This was Novo’s own ode to the virile male body and, I would argue, a challenge to his “virile” critics at home. Novo’s text appeared half in Spanish and half in English; although the text was also a “closeted” text, it nevertheless subverted Mexican nationalism through its use of English and its birth in the transnational interests both Novo and García Lorca had in men and travel. For example, the English section described a sailor in a way that put his body on display, i.e., the gaze of the queer author—and reader—is turned upon the virile worker’s body, at once acceding to nationalist claims that the male body be venerated while also undermining the nationalism by showing the body’s meaning and

⁶² Its limited circulation was a compromise between the desire to exchange such material with others and the realities of the homophobic public climate. Nevertheless, it shows that intellectuals did not always agree with the state’s efforts to define homosexuality exclusively in terms of effeminacy, as well as the possibility of homosexual virility itself being something that homosexuals would use as a means of self-definition *against* the *afeminados*.

⁶³ Irish-Mexican O’Gorman, brother of the painter Juan O’Gorman, would become a decorated professor of history and important critic of earlier styles of history writing, while his close friend Fernández would become a renowned art historian.

⁶⁴ John K. Walsh, “A Logic in Lorca’s Ode to Walt Whitman,” in *¿Entiendes? Queer Readings, Hispanic Writings*, ed. Emilie L. Bergmann and Paul Julian Smith (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 259.

⁶⁵ Rodríguez Lozano would also illustrate homoerotic affection between men in Judith Martínez Ortega’s memoirs on life at the Islas Marías, published a few years later. See Chapter 5.

⁶⁶ The Spaniard’s drawings linked the text to his own *Poeta en Nueva York*, which had its own sailor illustration and would influence Xavier Villaurrutia’s *Nocturno de Los Angeles*, another text about sailors. See below.

circulation in a “universal” or transnational sphere. In the poem, the sailor tells the person he addresses to “see these hands, they’re dirty. This finger is all torn from my work...I work for a living, but I’m no socialist or bolshevist or anything,” a claim that targeted the revolutionary writers and artists who critiqued Novo. A few stanzas later, the homoerotic gaze appears, as does its recognition (or a fantasy of that recognition) by the sailor/working-man, who says: “We see you at night / dancing on the deck/ or having swell drinks in the bar / or maybe you stare at us/ because you wonder /about real life/ and men who work for a living / as we do.”⁶⁷ Such lines referenced the queer interest in the male body, including that of working “real men,” which Novo himself preferred.⁶⁸ It also situated the gaze in the same legacy of García Lorca’s and Whitman’s writings on virile men being both desirable and potential sexual partners.

Novo had other, more strident responses for his critics. These disputed a singular vision of post-revolutionary identity and manhood by turning discourses on masculinity back upon those who had sought to condemn him. In 1926, Novo mocked Diego Rivera in his satirical *La Diegada*, a long poem in which Novo uses a working-class Mexican form of verbal jousting—the *albur*—as a means to dominate Rivera, and therefore mark *him* as the homosexual, through asserting Guadalupe Marín’s masculinity and Rivera’s own “femininity” (found in his overweight body and large breasts).⁶⁹ And in responding to Tristán Marof, who had openly criticized him in his 1934 work *Mexico de frente y de perfil*, Novo composed a sonnet titled “Un Marof.” He held back nothing, eviscerating the other’s masculinity in the Bolivian’s own style: Marof was “pus” born of a whore and the progeny of cuckolds who sucked the balls of Ezequiel

⁶⁷ Salvador Novo, *Seamen Rhymes* (Buenos Aires: A. Colombo, 1934).

⁶⁸ See the brilliant investigation of Novo’s interest in *chafiretes* (working-class chauffeurs) in Rubén Gallo, *Freud’s Mexico: Into the Wilds of Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2010), 13-51. This interest blended both modern technology and veneration of the proletarian body together.

⁶⁹ Marín was Rivera’s second wife. *La diegada* was a response to Rivera’s portrayal of the Contemporáneos in the murals at the Secretaría de Educación Pública building in the capital.

Padilla, a Mexican politician. As Salvador Oropesa has described, “to balance Marof’s homophobia, Novo portrays him as a pathetic homosexual. Instead of enjoying love and sex, Marof is more like a prostitute selling his services and body in the same miserable and humiliating manner he used to sell his pen.”⁷⁰ In both cases, Novo “homosexualizes” the other men, showing their virile posturing to be counterfeit and their homophobic charges against him to be absurd in light of their own failures to live up to masculine ideals, which, in their own logic, marked them as homosexual. It was a brilliant and biting move.

Yet, Novo’s rebuttal of Marof occluded his more private distress over the events of 1934. In a letter, written in English and addressed to Enrique Jimenez, without whom Novo claimed he was only “an ashtray” who made “one mistake after the other,” Novo aired his worries. Novo asserted had not been involved in the 1934 arrests, but that “apparently some fairies had been arrested in a dancing and they had given my name as theirs.”⁷¹ Novo made several efforts to suppress press articles about the roundup, but the efforts could only contain part of the story, as *Detectives* and *La Prensa* carried it. Lamented Novo, “Of course it was the talk of the town, and no one believes the truth as it happened.” Colleagues told him that they learned the police were to give Novo the “works” and fine him hard. Even worse, Novo had also learned of Marof’s book, as well as the fact that President Cárdenas had seen it and would know that “even in the foreign countries they tell stories about me.” Novo’s response was grim: “the world seemed to be going to crush me; never before had so many adverse circumstances conjured upon me.”⁷²

The crisis that so worried Novo was largely manufactured. A newspaperman had seen a policeman outside of a location that Novo owned where the poet had hosted a wild party

⁷⁰ Oropesa, *The Contemporáneos Group*, 61.

⁷¹ Perhaps Novo sought to occlude the writing from potential censors by using English, or perhaps this was a part of his defiance, much like the English in *Seamen Rhymes*.

⁷² Salvador Novo, “Novo to Enrique Jimenez (19),” September 29, 1934, CEHM, Archivo Salvador Novo, Fondo Antonio Lopez Mancera, Caja 2, Folder 2, No. 19.

involving a number of military cadets. At that party, which Novo had written to Enrique about the previous week, someone had stolen his radio, his “third hat of the season,” his money, and his shirt—“this apparently I cannot keep on,” he quipped.⁷³ The following morning, his office telephoned him that a policeman was at the party site, so Novo went to meet the police, who had seen the door open to Novo’s property. Novo tipped the policeman, and he noted to Enrique that “that was all...nothing had been stolen, the wigs and gowns had apparently not been seen, nor the warmly inscribed photos,” all of which would have been damning evidence of Novo’s deviancy. However, the newspaperman contrived a story, hiring taxis and bringing their cameras with them to wait at the Carmen jail for Novo and the others to arrive. Because no one arrived, they returned to their desks “furious, defeated, disillusioned,” which likely sparked the printing of the story anyway in spite. But, lamented Novo, “is there anybody on earth who would believe that it was all their imagination? NO, everybody thinks I fixed it all with money on my way.” Such things were not unheard of, as wealthier homosexuals could often buy their freedom or that of others around them, and to be sure, Novo had exerted influence to have the story suppressed.⁷⁴

In the end, despite worries about what would happen, Novo learned who his real friends were versus those who were waiting for an opportunity to undermine him. Many of his working colleagues urged him to stay on his job, so as not to appear “guilty;” this support bolstered him and demonstrated their sympathy for a man who did not hide his sexual interests. Nevertheless, he implored Enrique to write him and worried at the silence from other acquaintances. And, despite being scared by the whole experience, he was reluctant to fully abstain from “oh, so many lovely things,” although he acknowledged that he needed to be less indulgent.

⁷³ “Novo to Enrique Jimenez (18),” September 23, 1934, CEHM, Archivo Salvador Novo, Fondo Antonio Lopez Mancera, Caja 2, Folder 2, no. 18.

⁷⁴ “Case File 1/429: Pablo Ayala Garcia,” June 1927, AGN, CTMI, Caja 1, Exp. 429, AGN, CTMI, Caja 1, Exp. 429.

Novo's lifestyle, which involved free love, multiple relationships at the same time, and parties to host the young cadets—"as you know, he told Enrique, men are *always* here"—was one that threatened to spill into public at any moment. His was a world where a handsome man could be literally found around every corner: "I met Garibay, a splendid lieutenant, just around the corner and we got very, very drunk, so much so that I didn't mind his kissing and biting me at the very Regis Quick Lunch, before evvvery body...But that's another story," he wrote Enrique just before the scandal broke.⁷⁵ Yet, while often exuberant and unabashedly sexual and witty, his letters show a different side of a very public man, adding complexity to the stories told about him and his own self-presentation. These are significant because they illuminate both the opportunities and risks that he and other prominent homosexuals ran during the period, as well as the interest young men had in participating in the *ambiente* with a known homosexual.⁷⁶ How effective were efforts to bifurcate society between virile citizenship or traditional norms and homosexual anti-Mexicans if even the military academy contained numerous examples of outwardly virile men who were interested in Novo's charms? With such evidence, it is clear that the boundaries between "normal" and "abnormal" were far more porous than the nationalist intelligentsia had asserted; moreover, while the young men involved in Novo's circles did worry about negative publicity, he nevertheless maintained a steady stream of partners and social events, including for years after the scandal. The story, then, should not only be told as one about Novo, but also about the men who participated in the *ambiente* orbiting Novo. A remarkable man, yes, but one who depended on others to engage with him and his excesses; that they did so points to his appeal, as well as the more complicated behaviors which men—including those who did not identify as the same sort of homosexual as Novo did—were willing to do with other men.

⁷⁵ "Novo to Enrique Jimenez (18)."

⁷⁶ As noted above, many of his friends and acquaintances sent him photos of themselves in uniform or shirtless.

Transnational Eye Candy, Military Men, and Dreams of (Los) Angeles

Like Novo, fellow Contemporáneo Xavier Villaurrutia also enjoyed looking at men. His form of cruising—much like his homosexuality and his descriptions of it—was more reserved, as he would go out into the street to look, but not necessarily interact. While Novo was travelling in South America in late 1933, Villaurrutia wrote him about the happenings in the Mexican capital, giving a thinly-veiled description of his own pursuits, after a fashion, of the matters of the flesh:

I assure you that I did not experience any surprise with the reading of the detailed, refined, and hearty erotic statistics that you sent me. The past few days in Mexico have accustomed me to your gluttony of human flesh. Even in the street, in passing, I encounter some of the objects. I look at them, smile, remember you and pass without speaking to them...or simply most of the time, without being recognized.⁷⁷

Had Villaurrutia been a glutton of those objects of human flesh himself? His letter only teases us.

Further letters would continue to report his observations of men; they also were playfully ambiguous. Several letters came in 1935 and 1936 while Villaurrutia was on a scholarship at Yale University. One fall day, he took in a rugby match between Yale and Navy, and afterwards, he watched the sailors and cadets embark in electric trains.⁷⁸ In December 1935, he wrote about using Yale's athletic facilities, calling the gymnasium "marvelous" and making his diving "debut" in the deep pool, gushing about the "Olympic" scenes visible inside the gothic building.⁷⁹ The following spring, he noted that "these days the boys from every faculty are busy due to mid-term exams (and it is enough to go to the gym to notice the faculties,) although I must

⁷⁷ "Villaurrutia to Novo (1)," December 1933, CEHM, Archivo Salvador Novo, Fondo Antonio Lopez Mancera, Caja 4, Folder 1, No. 1. Although many of the letters between the men were published in the 1960s, they were sanitized and multiple sections describing men or amorous interests were excised, although to read them it appears that nothing was removed. This was part of the attempt to heteronormativize Villaurrutia, whose name would be given to a major literary prize in Mexico and who could not, then, be openly referred to as gay while still serving the state posthumously. For the censored versions of the letters, see Villaurrutia Xavier, *Cartas de Villaurrutia a Novo (1935-1936)* (Mexico: Ediciones de Bellas Artes, 1966).

⁷⁸ "Villaurrutia to Novo (3)," February 29, 1935, CEHM, Archivo Salvador Novo, Fondo Antonio Lopez Mancera, Caja 4, Folder 1, No. 3.

⁷⁹ "Villaurrutia to Novo (6)," December 1935, CEHM, Archivo Salvador Novo, Fondo Antonio Lopez Mancera, Caja 4, Folder 1, No. 6.

say that the back is always better than the front.) I'm sorry to disappoint you, but it's true."⁸⁰ The poet's observations emanated from his participation in the physical culture, both as a spectator and as a would-be athlete, while his letters played with desire—his and Novo's both.

A letter from January 1936 teased Novo about his campy behavior: "I was a little astonished to see the list of feminine names that appear with frequency in your letters: have you converted to sexual heterodoxy?" This was a playful jab at the ways that Novo's homosexuality blurred sex/gender norms—such as through the adoption of feminine names—and the efforts the state and its cultural agents made to disseminate heteronormativity.⁸¹ A few lines later, Villaurrutia teased Novo about his interest in cadets in a discussion of "politics:" "But tell me, what changes have you suffered with the new director of our prestigious Colegio Militar?"⁸²

By summer 1936, Villaurrutia went to Los Angeles. In a letter dated June 2, 1936, he again inquired after Novo's cadets and mused on the plethora of men available in LA:

you have determined, dear Salvador, that the continuous movement is, as is said of love, the deadlock, the real inertia: you have so many, that they escape from you; they escape from you because they are so many. And this sensation...is experienced here in [Los] Angeles, where beauty flows uniformly even, leaving you always with a new thirst.⁸³

Reading the letters, one is left with a feeling that the letter could barely contain Villaurrutia's passions, yet they remain churning under the surface of his reserved and poetic prose:

Los Angeles has no beauty but in the irresistible night. The nightclubs are beautiful and in them I rest, drinking beer before launching a new ascension to the sky to my room, on the ninth floor. When you believe that that ascension will be the last of the night, a

⁸⁰ "Villaurrutia to Novo (8)," February 3, 1936, CEHM, Archivo Salvador Novo, Fondo Antonio Lopez Mancera, Caja 4, Folder 1, No. 8. The comment seems more designed to goad Novo than describe reality.

⁸¹ "Villaurrutia to Novo (7)," January 17, 1936, CEHM, Archivo Salvador Novo, Fondo Antonio Lopez Mancera, Caja 4, Folder 1, No. 7. Importantly, not just cross-dressing *afeminados* had such names, as Novo shows.

⁸² Novo kept several photos of military men as keepsakes in his personal archive. One is a striking portrait of the young man in his uniform and labeled as Novo's boyfriend. The image may be of Enrique, described above, with whom Novo was passionately in love during the 1930s. See CEHM, Archivo Salvador Novo, Fondo Antonio Lopez Mancera, Caja 15.

⁸³ "Villaurrutia to Novo (14)," June 2, 1936, CEHM, Archivo Salvador Novo, Fondo Antonio Lopez Mancera, Caja 4, Folder 1, No. 14. The comment is one on Novo's rampant sex life, which clearly remained despite the scandal in 1934. Villaurrutia also noted that neither New York nor Chicago could compare to the joys of Los Angeles.

temptation, a new opportunity. I don't know the color that is the dream of Los Angeles, only that these are blue.

The last phrase—*solo que éstos son azules*—was an poetic reference to the sailors in the city, those who would facilitate a new temptation and who possibly accompanied Villaurrutia to his room. In another June 1936 letter from Pasadena, Villaurrutia was more explicit:

if the city [Los Angeles] is ugly by day, it is marvelous by night. Desire and satisfaction of that desire flow here as they do not in New York. [The] nightclubs [are] replete with sailors, fags, lesbians and all the cosmopolitan alfalfa (without forgetting the Filipinos of *ojos taquigráficos* (stenograph eyes), nor the Hawaiians...).⁸⁴

Indeed, Villaurrutia had learned what Nandino and Roberto Rivera had a few years before: that in Los Angeles, “it was easy to meet sailors—¡al por mayor!”⁸⁵

These experiences would lead to Villaurrutia's *Nocturno de Los Ángeles* (1936), written in the city and dedicated to Agustín Fink, a friend of both Novo and Villaurrutia who had shown the latter around the city.⁸⁶ The letters to Novo were trial runs of the larger poem, whose title was a double entendre on “angel” as both the city and the sailors named “Jack or John or Marvin or Louis” who appeared in Villaurrutia's text and illustrations.⁸⁷ In one image, set in the Paradise bar, one sailor rests his head on another's shoulder while the other holds him. His drawings recall those found in Jean Cocteau's *Livre blanc* (1928) and those made by Lorca for Novo's *Seamen*

⁸⁴ “Villaurrutia to Novo (13),” June 1936, CEHM, Archivo Salvador Novo, Fondo Antonio Lopez Mancera, Caja 4, Folder 1, No. 13. The mention of Hawaiians is a direct comment on Novo's own interest in such men, as discussed above and in his “Return Ticket” and a possible reference to Villaurrutia's own cosmopolitan desires in LA's transnational contact zone.

⁸⁵ The phrase signifies “wholesale” or “plenty” of men being available. In other words, it was very easy to meet them, as there were so many to be found everywhere in the “sexual market.”

⁸⁶ Fink, who worked in the cinema, was reputed to be sizably endowed, and Novo took on that challenge: Novo, *La estatua de sal*, 104. Cultural studies scholar José Quiroga, in his reading of Villaurrutia, suggests that the poet was being reserved about his interactions with Fink and that what “really” went on between them was the same sort of sex that Novo reported in his memoir. Quiroga argues that the “scaffolding” on which personal correspondence is made lends itself to “masks” and “silences” and that the poet was talking in code about his time in Los Angeles. While Villaurrutia was not as open as Novo about homosexuality, the letters Quiroga bases his arguments on were the censored versions that appeared in published form, rather than the full letters described here which, as shown above, contain more direct commentaries on homosexuality. Given such information, it seems just as likely that Fink was Villaurrutia's guide, rather than lover, and that the “mask” applied to him was one added later, rather than by the author himself. See Quiroga's insights in *Tropics of Desire*, 36-38.

⁸⁷ The prominence of the names suggests that Villaurrutia was exotifying the men.

Rhymes, although they are more realistic in execution than Lorca's stylized renderings; they nevertheless enter the transnational dialogue on the beauty and appeal of the male form, particularly that of sailors.⁸⁸ The subject of the poem is clear; one stanza reads:

*Rapidly the river of the street is populated by thirsty beings,
Who walk, pause, and proceed,
Exchanging glances, venturing smiles
Forming haphazard couples*⁸⁹

Through his own ode to sailors, Villaurrutia tied his homosexual desire to that of his friends—Novo, Fink, and Nandino—and literary contemporaries like Cocteau and García Lorca. He thus set himself within a larger international *oeuvre* that queered who the audience of masculinity was intended to be, while also showing how the unintended consequence of physical culture was the possibility that it could be appropriated through homosexual desire. Instead of heterosexual comrades and women, men of the *ambiente* were those extolling the virtues of masculinity.

The experiences detailed above also show how foreign travel offered opportunities for Mexican men of certain means to experience an “exotic” culture and local varieties of male beauty.⁹⁰ The experiences of modernity that shaped these Mexican men through trajectories of transnational travel occurred concurrently with patterns of travel experienced by European and US American travelers. Men of the *ambiente* used social networks and spaces to facilitate their experiences; for example, several of Novo's friends stayed at New York's Barbazon Plaza Hotel, including one also named Salvador. He was handsome; photos in Novo's collection show him in

⁸⁸ Robert McKee Irwin noted the similarity between Villaurrutia's drawings and those by Cocteau in *Mexican Masculinities*, 173. The Paradise bar may have been an allegory on the “paradise” that Villaurrutia found in Los Angeles and representative of the bars he found there. It may also have been a real place. Lillian Faderman and Tom de Simone, both specialists on LGBT history in Los Angeles, have described in personal communications that at least two establishments had the name “Paradise”, although one was known more as a lesbian bar in the 1950s and the other a jazz venue catering to African Americans in the 1930s. There may have been others with the name.

⁸⁹ Xavier Villaurrutia, *Nocturno de Los Ángeles* (Mexico: Ediciones del Equilibrista, 1987). The original was published in 1936 in a 100-copy run.

⁹⁰ Mexico offered similar opportunities for American and European tourists.

uniform—another piece of evidence that there were homosexual military men—and in a well-fitting suit. In October 1935, he wrote Novo a fascinating letter detailing his “heart troubles”:

I met a boy, tall and handsome, manly and clever, but only 18 years... He approached me and asked for an address. I was prompt and solicitous. He had arrived the day before from the state of Washington... What was he doing in New York? His father had promised him round trip passage... if Roy (the boy) would pass his high school exams. The boy did... I warned him about the danger of New York, but he insisted on seeing me that same evening. I did. Everything went smooth. He answered to my caresses and before long, we were in bed together, bodies nude, close to each other and our lips met as in a symphony [sic] of desire. I was so happy. He did what I wanted him to do, and was not active.⁹¹

Two weeks later Salvador discovered that despite their “unchanged” bliss, the young man’s money had run out. “Was I to let this bliss drift away from my life? No,” he responded, and then suggested that Roy stay with his support until he found a job. Unfortunately, wrote Salvador, “Now I am broke. I pay for his board, his room, his diversions, his needs. I provide for everything.” But Salvador loved him, so he continued the arrangement. One day, during a lunch, he noticed Roy crying and asked why; Roy confessed he was crying because he loved Salvador “so much.” “Maybe I am stupid,” Salvador wrote, “but that is enough to make me happy.”

By the time of the letter, Salvador faced serious financial problems, both for himself and for Roy. Nevertheless, he sent Novo a check for five dollars, and he asked for a copy of “Return Ticket” as well as a Spanish version of *Nuevo Amor*, promising to make up the difference either by “pawn[ing] my crown jewels” or sending Novo “a nice ‘turista’ or two,” thereby completing the transnational queer travel circuit. Indeed, in a satisfying way, Salvador’s letter serves as this section’s “return ticket,” and it complicates the norm of tourists going to Mexico by putting American tourists within a queer sphere of consumption initiated by Mexicans. Moreover, it offers another glimpse into the amorous and emotions lives that homosexual Mexican men lived.

⁹¹ Salvador (?) to Salvador Novo, October 3, 1935. CEHM, Archivo Salvador Novo, Fondo Antonio López Mancera, caja 2, folder 1, no. 4.

But there is more to be found in these letters. In the accounts from Novo and Villaurrutia, we see a homoerotic gaze turned onto the male body, from the sun-toasted beach boys of Hawaii and men walking the streets of Mexico City, to the sailors of Los Angeles. This gaze reveals that physical culture could never just be national; it was always inflected with transnational characteristics, as there was a “universal” ideal of masculinity that circulated, regardless of its appropriation for national aims and even, as in the case of sailors, as integral parts of national power. Indeed, homosexual men participated in this transnational physical culture—if at times only as spectators—shaped it, and consumed it in ways that challenged the more limited vision of what masculinity or masculine development was to mean in post-revolutionary Mexico. In other words, physical cultures enabled the consumption of the male form by homosexuals in more open ways, and it is doubtful how virility could have been fully understood without such appreciation. Travel, whether at the behest of the Mexican government, for a prestigious award, or for personal interests, also facilitated cross-fertilization with homosexual cultures elsewhere.

We also see a homosexual Mexican man doting on an American teenager, playing the “active” role with him sexually and financially, and falling in love. A Mexican played a version of the “normative” male role, in other words, while the “fresh-off-the-boat” migrant was an American. Both men were *legible* to each other as homosexual, suggesting there was also some sort of universality to the glances in the salted world that translated across cultures, metropolises, and beyond. Rather than Salvador moving to New York in order to learn how to become “gay,” he instead was the more experienced one who took Roy, the “provincial” youth, under his wing.

To think about homosexual men of the middle and upper classes in Mexico, particularly the Contemporáneos, requires a perspective not bounded by the nation. Indeed, many of these men saw themselves as much citizens of Mexico as citizens of a larger world. Such international

interests marked the men as anti-nationalist in the eyes of their critics, although from their own words, their interest in Mexico remained passionate and patriotic. What is more, they recognized that the ideas of Mexico and *lo mexicano* were being constructed in the spaces between the local, national, and transnational, and they embraced the idea of being part of a “universal” whole, a status to which Mexico was paradoxically aspiring during the aftermath of the Revolution, despite the claims to the contrary made by nationalists. That is, these men recognized the fallacies in claiming that what was becoming Mexico was bounded by national aims rather than influenced by and a product fashioned within larger transnational discourses of culture.⁹²

The story that has been told about Mexican homosexuality prior to 1968 has traditionally been based on largely literary examples from the Contemporáneos. Homosexual life and identity, according to this view, was limited to a handful of individuals like Novo, Nandino, and Villaurrutia who had economic assets, could travel, and the political connections that, while not completely protecting them, offered them opportunities. The risks that men ran through their cruising, their partying, and romantic entanglements were less important to them than the various pleasures they sought, and such men, who knew “what they were,” formed the “gay ghetto.”

However, this view is only part of the story. This section has complicated literary understandings of the men by engaging their personal documents, letters, and photographs in an attempt to add depth to men defined often by their own presentation through literature and the critiques of others around them. In the following section, I complicate who was part of the *ambiente* by including not just the experiences of men like Novo and Villarrutia, but also those of the men of other classes and lines of identification they encountered. Indeed, the transnational spaces and interactions useful to these men that they found abroad also existed in the Mexican

⁹² The same could be said about politics and science, for that matter.

capital (and other urban centers). The “flows” that Villaurrutia found in Los Angeles could be found in Mexico City at the same time; what is more, they were not *caused* by the men above—nor by their return from abroad— but such men participated within them. However, as we will see, not all men could successfully flout virile norms and escape the state’s sanction.

III. Perils, Passions, and Pleasures: Being Homosexual in Mexico, 1920-1940

In various publications, Carlos Monsiváis asserted that in contrast to the Contemporáneos, less fortunate homosexuals lived lives “seized with panic” and under constant threat from state or societal intervention.⁹³ To his credit, Monsiváis opened terrain for considering that homosexual identities and communities existed prior to the 1970s. And, it is true that there were perils for all homosexuals—whether rich or poor—and those at the lower end of the socio-economic scale faced greater threats from the state. Nevertheless, ample opportunities existed for men outside the intelligentsia, and theirs was not a life lived exclusively or even necessarily primarily in fear. The *ambiente* or “salted world,” to use Novo’s term, consisted in large part of an archipelago—of spaces, interactions, and identities—that incorporated the Contemporáneos but was not limited to them. In fact, popular class men were important to the *ambiente*, a role that would increase by the 1940s. Their stories complicate the intersections between the nation, the transnational, and homosexuality, as well as the slippages between definitions of each.

While is true that most of what can be known about these men comes when their actions had earned the attention of the press, police, or judicial system, these sources can nevertheless be gleaned for information about their lives. Their lives also intersected with those of Novo and Nandino, whose memoirs serve as another source. The examples collected here demonstrate the

⁹³ Carlos Monsiváis, “The 41 and the Gran Redada,” in *The Famous 41: Sexuality and Social Control in Mexico, 1901*, ed. Robert McKee Irwin, Edward J. McCaughan, and Michelle Rocio Nasser (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 165; Carlos Monsiváis, “El mundo soslayado (Donde se mezclan la confesión y la proclama),” in *La estatua de sal* (Mexico, D.F.: CONACULTA, 1998), 20.

ways in which dissident sexuality was expressed at multiple levels, across social class, and by individuals of differing senses of self. While contemporary observers derided homosexuality's survival efforts to eliminate or "treat" it politically, scientifically, and culturally, I argue that the flourishing *ambiente* was a crucial phenomenon and it incorporated specific contact zones, in Pratt's terms, in which the convergences between the national and transnational, between the normative and abnormal, come most fully into relief. It is fitting, then, to begin with a party, that most festive form of convergence where barriers and inhibitions are porous before possibility.

Reprises of the Famous 41 and the "Shameful Sons of Sodom and Gomorrah"

Just days before Christmas in December 1921, a group of men held a *posada*, a traditional Mexican holiday party, at 116 Heroés street in Colonia Guerrero, a working-class area north-northwest of the city center.⁹⁴ Many of the attendees appeared in drag, emulating some of the capital's most famous artists and using the performers' names "as if they were their own." In their "Temple of Terpsichore," more than twenty pairs of dancers moved through the salon, all strikingly dressed in feminine attire and enjoying the festive soiree. Among these were "'La Conesa', 'Chabela,' 'La Argentinita' and others of this style."⁹⁵ The men reveled in their cross-dressing and the community with likeminded peers who expressed *de ambiente* personas.

Of course, not everyone approved of the party, and someone tipped off the police. They, in turn, raided the party. In a testament to the men's successful performances, even the police were initially unsure if the dancers were the genuine stars. Looking more closely, they found

⁹⁴ A common party in the Christmas season that often feature piñatas, *ponche* (a type of punch), and various other special foods and activities; often neighborhoods turn out for their own parties, and some are open for anyone passing by. An aside: Mrs. L. M. Terry of Mexico City, an "able exponent with pen and camera of the glowing life of pleasure-loving Mexico" wrote a piece, "The Queer Christmas Festivities in Mexico" (in *The Wide World Magazine*, December 1900, pages 218-225) describing the parties to an Anglo-American audience that in retrospect is ironic, as there really were "queer" *posada* parties.

⁹⁵ "Una reprise del baile de los 41," *Excelsior*, December 22, 1921, 5. Maria Conesa was a Mexican actress.

instead “various individuals that danced dressed as women,” and they moved in to capture them.

Police reported hearing fragments of conversation, including “‘Where is Conesa?’... ‘Argentinita, my love, who calls for me?’... ‘Listen Chabella, I am upset with you,’ all said in falsetto and lispy voices. For police, the partygoers’ affected voices gave off a “vile and disgusting air.” After hearing enough, they burst into the party, causing enormous confusion. “‘The police!’—was the cry of alarm as the men scattered. The resulting chaos turned the salon into a “theater costume room.” Like others who had been “discovered,” the men likely felt a false sense of security and privacy at the event. When found, many of the men made an effort to reclaim their masculinity in order to escape, casting away their feminine clothes and attempting to replace them with the “costumes” of their daily existence. Some did manage to flee, but police captured a dozen dressed in “incomplete costumes”, taking them as part of a “grotesque caravan” to the precinct. The raid destroyed the liminal opportunities the salon provided, a space where the barriers between the *ambiente* and the men’s quotidian lives were disrupted. Perhaps the aim was just to have a party and to camp it up, but we should also allow for the possibility that these men expressed the identities, style, mannerisms, and names because they were in some way more “authentic” than the personas required to survive in a homophobic society.

The parallels of the raid to that in November 1901—the men in drag, over forty attendees—was not lost on newspaper *Excelsior*, which labeled the event as a “reprise of the dance of the 41” and, like its predecessors two decades before, graphically reveled in the details of the event. The following day, a series of cartoons by Pepe Nava and Cabral entitled “Septima Posada—¡Vaya Bromita!” depicted a posada party, and one mentioned La Argentina and La

Conesa having already left, a clear reference to the earlier event.⁹⁶ *Excelsior*'s coverage made explicit the association of male effeminacy and homosexuality, asserting that the men were not just humorous individuals in drag, but were veritable sons of Sodom and Gomorrah. That is, coverage of the "reprise" of the Famous 41 demonstrated how homosexuality and transvestism were viewed as facets of the same form of social delinquency; such men were damned, vile, and disgraceful, and cross-dressing could not escape association with sexual deviancy.

Yet, this story also shows how at the same time that journalists (along with their counterparts in criminology and medicine) were defining the *afeminado* as a type, men were expressing the queer sensibilities and personas that embraced a notion of campy otherness that marked them as a type. That is, the process of "straight" society delineating the homosexual other went hand-in-hand with the other's self-definition, and these processes mutually reinforced each other. By 1921, one version of *afeminado*—recognizable for his effeminate attire—was becoming a more fleshed-out type, and what is more, becoming more cognizant of himself as that sort of type. In the following decade, this self-recognition would grow.⁹⁷

!Bataclanismo;

Spectacle was not limited to private parties, and the theater served as a site of legibility between men of the *ambiente*, as well as an inspiration for identities. On February 12, 1925, the grand

⁹⁶ Pepe Nava and Cabral, "Posadas de 'Excelsior,'" *Excelsior*, December 23, 1921, 5. Cabral would go on to draw other representations of homosexuals throughout the following decades, including the 1941 *Jueves de Excelsior* cover referenced in the introduction.

⁹⁷ Four years later, another group of *afeminados*, the majority of them dressed in women's clothing held a party. Many of the attendees were "well-known in the Capital," which caused a scandal when police caught them "red-handed" in a "frenzied and awkward orgy." The men had installed themselves in an ad hoc basis throughout the city, "especially in Colonia Roma apartments." See "Va a hacerse una razzia de sujetos de conducta dudosa para enviarlos a las Islas Marias," *El Democrata*, September 14, 1925. They were also blamed for the disappearances of various youths in the city. Roma would serve as a focal point for middle-class members of the *ambiente* throughout the century, and one of the most famous books written about Mexican homosexuality—*El vampiro de la Colonia Roma*—would trade the activities of a man famous for his conquests in the 1970s. See Luis Zapata, *El vampiro de la Colonia Roma* (Mexico, D.F.: Debosillo, 2004).

spectacle of *Voilà Paris: La Ba-ta-clán* appeared at the Teatro Iris and sent shockwaves through the capital and beyond. Eagerly anticipated for some time, businesses took advantage of the show's arrival to market their services, with Ferrocarriles Nacionales de Mexico offering special rates to the capital in both first and second class for individuals to attend the event.⁹⁸ The Paris revue, under the direction of Madame Berthe Rosini, comprised of a mix of "classical ballet, Ziegfeld Follies chorus lines, and *tableaux vivants*."⁹⁹ These both shocked some audiences and enjoyed enthusiastic approval from others, spurring a larger phenomenon of *bataclanismo*, one of the greatest examples yet of the erotic revolution underway in Mexico. Even more, as Ageeth Sluis asserted, *bataclanismo* was a "normative discourse that reached far beyond the theater into the practice of everyday life" that "launched a new female star, the *bataclana*" whose body became the site of contested and divergent notions of modernity."¹⁰⁰ As part of *bataclanismo*, the barriers between stage and reality broke down. Examples can be seen in the marketing of the "bataclanesque" look in portrayals of modern girls within the Mexican press.¹⁰¹

A month after the revue appeared, a Mexican version—the Voila Mexique: El Rataplan—premiered in the Teatro Lírico. What marked it distinct was that this version "fused eroticized female nudity and social commentary, a combination that quickly became a common feature of the Mexican revistas" (revues). It thus offered "audiences an alternate way to navigate modernity as well as messages emanating from the reform-minded state." the show's most important legacy was the promotion of what Sluis has termed the "deco body", a new feminine physique that stressed length, height, and androgyny. This deco body influenced a "distinct urban

⁹⁸ The offer extended even to travelers from as far away as Veracruz.

⁹⁹ Bataclan was one of Offenbach's witty and satirical operettas; hence revues, which also included wit and satire, utilized the name.

¹⁰⁰ Ageeth Sluis, "BATACLANISMO! Or, How Female Deco Bodies Transformed Postrevolutionary Mexico City," *The Americas* 66, no. 4 (April 2010): 470.

¹⁰¹ See for example "Ad for Roche Cognac," *Excelsior*, September 16, 1925; "Ad for Telefónica y Telegráfica Mexicana," *Excelsior*, September 16, 1925. The first ad included scantily-clad modern girls.

modernity and sociability” in the capital that “ushered in new gender ideals, helped visualize urban modernity, and bridged the gap between two divergent discourses that accompanied revolutionary reform, *indigenismo* and *mestizaje*, paving the way for a ‘mestizo modernity.’”¹⁰²

Yet, the phenomenon of *bataclanismo* was not limited to women. Indeed, what has not been discussed previously was homosexual men’s reaction to and participation in *bataclanismo*. Given the interest of many *afeminados* in emulating silver screen starlets and dancers like Pavlova, the arrival of the Bataclan must have initiated great interest among those who could afford the one-to-five peso cost of attending or those who saw press or commercial images from the show. In addition, the Teatro Iris was also conveniently located 36 Donceles street within an area known for its *ambiente* and that included residences, cantinas, and other venues.¹⁰³ Nearby were the cruisy streets of Madero and República de Cuba, the Plaza Garibaldi, and the Alameda. The Paris revue premiered in an area of many potential *de ambiente* customers.

And see the show they did. The revue’s impact—and that of its successors—on the *ambiente* can be seen in the bataclanesque shows *afeminados* put on for an appreciative audience of Lecumberri prison inmates—who themselves asked for the dances—in 1929. These shows depended knowledge of what the chorus line and costumes looked like and appropriate dancing styles.¹⁰⁴ These styles would also appear at private parties and impromptu cabarets for decades; even the press recognized the performances as part of *bataclanismo*.¹⁰⁵

What is more, during the 1920s, men also participated in *bataclanismo* professionally

¹⁰² Sluis, “BATACLANISMO,” 470.

¹⁰³ For example, in 1921, while he finished his last year of *preparatoria* at age 17, Salvador Novo lived with Xavier Villaurrutia and another friend at the corner of Donceles and Argentina streets nearby. The young men, as well as others they inducted into their circle, would become known as “the Donceles girls.” Novo, *La estatua de sal*, 105.

¹⁰⁴ Maria Concepción Acevedo y de la Llata (Madre Conchita), *Obregón: Memorias inéditas de la Madre Conchita* (Mexico, D.F.: Libro-Mex, Editores, S. de R. L., 1957), 61-62.

¹⁰⁵ See for example, “Veinticinco tipos equivocados presos en el Carmen ayer,” *El Nacional*, April 4, 1947, sec. 2, 4.; “Fiesta de cuarenta pobres degenerados,” *Excelsior*, August 19, 1947, 21.

from the start. Famed photographer Agustín Casasola documented men performing in “French Revues” at the Teatro Iris in 1925.¹⁰⁶ One photo entitled “Tiples con su vestuario de fantasia” (Sopranos with their fantasy wardrobe) shows a series of dancers, most likely all male, posing in bawdy costumes: short skirts, heels, padded bras and tops, hats, and wigs, both curly blonde and dark, straight bobs. Makeup highlighted their gender-bending, with heavy use of eye-shadow and mascara and lips painted in the shape of a heart, as was customary at the time.¹⁰⁷ A second photo, “Cortistas con globos” (Chorus Girls with Balloons) shows a pair of dancers together; one appears male, but even if not, the photo shows that revue’s women and men dressed similarly.¹⁰⁸

If the *pelona*, the modern girl, and the Bataclan chorus girl were symbols of modernity, then what should be made of men in drag appearing as if they were modern girls? If the new ideas of femininity unleashed by the erotic revolution in Mexico—and interconnected with those emerging and being expressed elsewhere—was both sexual and ambiguous, androgynous and beautiful, then were men who participated in *bataclanismo* then themselves “modern girls”? Such performances undermined the strict separation of gender roles that the writers, artists, and politicians in Chapter 3 had sought, and they rejected nationalist virility in favor of transnational understandings of beauty. In essence, they were one example of the limits of power—whether from state institutions or cultural authorities—to penetrate every societal sphere. And that Casasola photographed them as part of his *oeuvre* of Mexican photography suggests that the deviant was not as antithetical to the post-Revolutionary nation as it was made to be.

¹⁰⁶ The theater was inaugurated on May 25, 1918 at Calle Donceles 36.

¹⁰⁷ Casasola, Inventario 97988, “Tiples con su vestuario de fantasia,” Silver Gelatin Print, ca. 1925, found in Ortíz Monasterio, *Mirada y memoria*, 138, 142-143. The caption reads It is unclear if this image portrays the revues that were sent to Latin America by the Bataclan theater in Paris, France, or the Mexican version, which appeared shortly thereafter. It is also unclear if the men are Mexican or foreign from the photo caption. If they were foreign, it implies acceptance of the “foreign other” in drag (just like in the case of Fregoli in Chapter 2) while locals who did so were frowned upon or even arrested if in public.

¹⁰⁸ Casasola, Inventario 97995, “Cortistas con globos,” Silver Gelatin Print, ca. 1925, found in *Ibid.*, 144.

The images show that in the theater, at least, some measure of acceptance for transvestism survived past the public scandals of the early 1900s. That such revues took place in 1925—and generated such interest and profit that multiple theaters showed them—is significant because of the vitriol levied against transvestism and sex/gender nonconformity. Cross-dressing was still used in ways that mocked male effeminacy, such as in a 1921 Carnival exhibition where a matador dressed in drag and “ran screeching and making a thousand ridiculous contortions at seeing himself pursued by the bull.”¹⁰⁹ Yet, when Esperanza Iris, the Teatro Iris’s proprietor, embraced *bataclanismo*, she helped disseminate positive, modern images of deco bodies to a wider audience, facilitating its emulation by women *and* men of the *ambiente*.¹¹⁰

Legibility, Ambiguity, and the Ambiente

Around the same time as *bataclanismo* swept through the capital, some men were perfecting their cruising skills in public, learning how to make themselves legible to others in the *ambiente*. In the early 1920s, Elias Nandino moved to Mexico City, enrolling in the national medical school when he was 23. He became enamored with the city because its public spaces allowed him to “continue exercising and sharpening my abilities for seduction, through which I got many adventures, or at least met people.” One of his cruising sites was the Alameda Park, still a popular place for its *ambiente*.¹¹¹ One day, he cruised “a beautiful creature, a boy of about seventeen” carrying a baton; they flirted and he learned that the youth was “working” and that he knew the Alameda to be a place where he might make a living or have some fun.¹¹²

Because the conversation was so pleasant, Nandino invited to the youth home for a

¹⁰⁹ “La novillada de ayer: De Carnaval,” *El Diario*, February 21, 1921, 8.

¹¹⁰ Iris herself blurred the lines between the masculine and the feminine, as she at times dressed in masculine attire.

¹¹¹ It was still a site where the homosexual social sphere and that of mainstream Mexicans overlapped.

¹¹² Enrique Aguilar, *Elías Nandino: una vida no/velada*, 2nd ed. (Mexico, D.F.: Oceano, 2000), 74.

coffee, “with the undeclared proposition of seeing if we could arrive at something more.” They made their way toward his boarding house at Guatemala 44, east of the Zócalo. On the way, Nandino noticed looks from passersby, so he was on guard for persecution while the youth chattered away, oblivious to possible threats. Eventually they arrived safely, but Nandino was in for a surprise. As he fumbled his keys, several dogs surrounded them. When he expressed alarm, the youth replied that they were his, and he could make them “jump, dance, [and] make jokes” while directing them with his baton. Disillusioned, but also amused, Nandino offered the youth refreshment elsewhere instead, saying that he could return another time without the dogs.¹¹³

The story illustrates how both Nandino and the youth sought opportunities in the Alameda, although not necessarily of the same variety. Nandino’s interests were clearly spelled out, but we are told little about the youth. Nevertheless, his interest in making money on the street mirrored that of the youths brought before the Tribunal de Menores. Perhaps the youth only hoped to make a few pesos; perhaps he just wanted someone to talk to and was naïve to Nandino’s advances or unfamiliar with the park’s reputation. However, it is just as likely, if not more so, that he knew of the possibilities that a man met in the Alameda might offer, from conversation to a meal, some money, sex, or even patronage. It was not uncommon, after all, for older men to dote on younger men.¹¹⁴ Thus, the “beautiful creature” had opportunities, whether he was fully aware of them or not. One wonders if his claim of “working” in the park was a

¹¹³ Ibid., 75.

¹¹⁴ As Salvador Novo described in his memoir, many Mexican men in the *ambiente* sought younger partners to shower their wealth or attention upon; likewise, younger men sought more established men for such attention and the chance to experience a different class status. Novo himself, when young, was courted by older men courted Novo in his own youth in the late 1910s and early 1920s, and others introduced him to men so that he might become their younger companion and potential inheritor of their wealth. One friend set Novo up twice, for example, hoping to “marry” him off well. Although Novo found himself more interested in the rough trade among the chauffeurs—going so far as being a significant contributor to the magazine *El Chafirete*—rather than the wealthy men, he courted attention from men offering access and opportunities. This is but one of the examples of the phenomenon that he described. See Novo, *La estatua de sal*, 110-111.

cover for other interests, particularly as street youths often had same-sex experiences across age groups.¹¹⁵ If he were so eager to show off his dogs—rather than accompanying Nandino to other possibilities—then why had he waited until they arrived at Nandino’s home to indicate as such?

Nandino’s concern about the passersby that saw them together is also important. He ran a risk that his homosexuality might be legible to disapproving non-queer others, the result of which was being charged with corruption of minors. His memoir illuminates how homosexual men responded to the risks facing them. Like Novo, his concern for safety and reputation showed that the key was being legible to men in the *ambiente* and not those who would persecute him.

Transnational Fashion: Where Everyone Knows You with a Single Glance

Sometime after his experience with the youth with the dogs, Nandino was back at the Alameda, this time with friends Roberto Rivera, Novo, and Villaurrutia. As Nandino remembered,

Shortly after we met, ‘*balón*’ pants, that were wide at the bottom so that the cuffs covered one’s shoes, became fashionable. It occurred to us to get those pants made, of the same color. Once they were delivered...we went for a walk in the Centro, uniformed by height; Salvador, who was the tallest, at one extreme, and Xavier, who was the shortest, at the other.

The men thus exhibited the latest in modern style; their pants were versions of “Oxford Bags,” a type of baggy, wide-legged trousers from Oxford University that became popular menswear by the mid-1920s. The men also participated in a transnational homosexual culture—Oxford Bags were worn and popularized in part by gay men in Britain; the look also appeared in New York.¹¹⁶

Being fashionable was part of participating in the *ambiente*, a space where fashion and desire often intersected. For men of means—or their working-class lovers—acquiring sumptuous goods in the early 1920s. Dandies could shop along Madero, a major thoroughfare in the “salted world,” at stores like the Regal and High Life, purveyors of note who helped define masculine

¹¹⁵ See Chapter 3.

¹¹⁶ Shaun Cole, *Don We Now Our Gay Apparel: Gay Men's Dress in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Berg, 2000), 17. It is unclear if the Mexicans knew that homosexuals like them had popularized the pants.

“looks” for decades. Numerous *fifis* strolled the street.¹¹⁷ This was a world where men knew each other with only a glance; as some strolled by, others watched from doorways—such as that of El Globo building—and cast glances at passersby, including the virile, “real” young men prized by *ambiente* members. Men like “Madre Meza” and “La Golondrina” would troll the street, offering these handsome young men guitar lessons, then taking them into his apartment, measuring their manhood, and shopping them around to his wealthy clientele.¹¹⁸ Novo, and others like him, was thrilled to discover this world of salted glances, a world intelligible to those who were in-the-know (*entendidos*) that nevertheless overlapped with the “normal” social spheres.

Nandino developed his own coded forms of communication with his schoolmate Rivera:

We went to the cinema, to the theater, to have a coffee or to walk and see people. From these meanderings was emerging a species of complicity because little by little we were making between us a common language, and after that with a gesture, a look, or an exclamation, we understood each other; for example, when we saw in the street boys that we liked.¹¹⁹

The codes bolstered their friendship, allowing them to share experiences and desires without them being publicly known. Nandino and Rivera shared this form of interaction with homosexual men throughout the world, who also developed code words, gestures, camp names, double entendres, sustained eye contact, and more to signal interest or homosexual identity.¹²⁰ Failure to know the cues—or how they shifted in response to threats—rendered the *ambiente* less intelligible to dominant culture, so that queer men could pass, particularly if they did not deploy stereotypes based on gendered forms of sexual difference as did the most visible *afeminados*.

Beyond language and salted looks, fashion was an important marker of openness to, if not

¹¹⁷ Novo, *La estatua de sal*, 73.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 102.

¹¹⁹ Aguilar, *Una vida no/velada*, 78. Nandino and his friends also gave each other nicknames; Nandino’s for Novo was “Nalgador Sovo” which played on the size of his ass. See pg. 141.

¹²⁰ See for example James N. Green, *Beyond Carnival: Male Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 180.; Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 136-137.; and the numerous examples cited in Chauncey, *Gay New York*, referred to in the index under “tactics”.

outright membership in, the *ambiente*, largely because of the consumption and promotion of innovative trends by homosexual men. For example, in the decades following the 1901 scandal, dandies, particularly of the homosexual variety, could be recognized by their white suits,

shoes (*choclos*) of the same color, blue handkerchief in the American pocket, red flower in his buttonhole, Panama hat with colored band, either red or blue or both combined, walking so as to exhibit as much as possible his shoes.¹²¹

The men were thus vain, flashy—particularly with their shoes—and incorporated international elements in their personal attire. Novo was among them, shopping for “his dream shoes with white rubber soles” along Av. Madero during the 1920s.¹²² Throughout much of the decade, such styles, as well as the “*pantalones balón*, tailless and tight jackets, *sombreros carrete o de paja* during the spring, *zapatos borceguis* with laces or buttons, and hats, caps or Spanish berets” remained in vogue.¹²³ These specific styles began to go out of style by the late 1920s, along with “sock garters (*ligas*), suspenders, and felt leggings,” in favor of newer styles like detachable collared shirts and neckties in the 1930s and zoot-suits in the 1940s, although masculine “elegance” as depicted through a well-fitting suit and hat remained into the 1940s.¹²⁴

The sortie into the Centro by Nandino, Novo, Rivera, and Villaurrutia did not go unnoticed. As Nandino wrote, “When we passed by the Alameda dressed so, we encountered such heavy whistling and stoning that we had to run and even we had to board a taxi to go more quickly to remove that look.”¹²⁵ This experience details how the Alameda remained a contested

¹²¹ Moisés González Navarro, *Historia moderna de México, vol. IV, La vida social* (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Hermes, 1957), 410. He was citing “Nuestra generación degenera,” *Heraldo de Morelos*, February 28, 1909, 2.

¹²² Novo, *La estatua de sal*, 73.

¹²³ *Borceguí* also seems to mean a type of “buskin,” i.e., an open-toed, calf length boots tied together with laces; common in Roman times on soldiers. *Sombreros carrete o de paja* are straw hats with a ribbon/Boaters.

¹²⁴ Miko Viya, *México Ayer* (Puebla: Editorial Cajica, S.A., 1988), 75-76. See Chapter 6 for more on elegant masculinity. Photos of Novo’s close friends from the 1930s shows them to be stylish, sporting well-fitting suits and with fashionable hairstyles. These are found in the CEHM, Archivo Salvador Novo, Caja 15. The demand for these items demonstrates the persistence of conspicuous consumption among men, as well as the active efforts made by purveyors of menswear to cultivate a diverse clientele.

¹²⁵ Aguilar, *Una vida no/velada*, 78-79.

space between multiple social spheres. Nevertheless, that the four “musketeers”, as Nandino called them, pushed fashion limits in public at all is important evidence of how Mexican men challenged boundaries and appropriated spaces for self-expression, if only briefly. The men’s performance should be seen as an expression of a shared identity: a recognition of how they were distinct from others and shared both pleasures and risks associated with being visibly. This recognition brought both masculine and feminine homosexuals together. And, they would return to the park, subverting the victory of those who mocked them for their pants one cruise at a time.

In broader terms, the adoption of the new styles was evidence of the men’s “universal vision”—in which the nation was subsumed by the transnational—that set the men at odds with their nationalist critics. The musketeers’ focus on external trends threatened efforts made by some Mexicans to effect an exclusively defined virile citizenship because their tastes, from their critics’ perspectives, cast their masculinity—and thus their viability as citizens—into doubt. For example, Stridentist Germán List Arzubide sought in 1926 to undermine the Contemporáneos as legitimate cultural producers because of their association with the Alameda:

The customary *verseros* (verse-writers) have been discovered in the Alameda, together in girlie meetings and have been forced by the Inspección General de Policía to declare their sex and to prove it, accused of a blackmail of fallen masculinity.¹²⁶

List Arzubide’s description tied the work of the Stridentists and the police together as part of a common cause to create a strong, patriarchal nation from which undesirables were necessarily excised. By calling out the Alameda’s *verseros*, List Arzubide linked the cultural and literary values of men like musketeers to moral degeneracy; in this way, the “anti-social” writing of the Contemporáneos that “valued the universal over the national and took no clear position on social and political issues, at a time when other writers were advocating a literature of revolutionary

¹²⁶ Germán List Arzubide, *El Movimiento Estridentista* (Jalapa, Veracruz: Ediciones de Horizonte, 1927), 47.

commitment” became linked with the “anti-social” nature of male effeminacy and homosexuality on frequent display in the Alameda.¹²⁷ Even more, as Elissa Rashkin has argued,

The precarious masculine model that emerged in the wake of the Revolution required more than the objectification of women; it also depended on constant comparison with a more threatening ‘other’, the gay male.¹²⁸

One wonders if this was a reaction to homosexuals’ success in appropriating spaces, as using the Alameda, at least from critics perspectives, marked someone as morally and sexually suspect. Of course, the Alameda’s centrality as a recreational site, a work-space, and a site for encountering heterosexual lovers complicated the contrast that List Arzubide sought to make. How could one be sure that an individual found in there was indeed homosexual? This, after all, was the problem that police faced; if someone could pass as “normal,” they thwarted efforts to eliminate homosexual activities in the park, even as legible *afeminados* were being arrested.

The Ambiente and Roundups in the Alameda

In July 1929, at the height of the turmoil surrounding the presidential election between José Vasconcelos and Pascual Ortíz Rubio, delegates gathered for the fourth anti-reelectionist campaign in Mexico City.¹²⁹ As members debated issues like women’s suffrage, Rodolfo Uranga, a delegate from Chihuahua, rose to speak. A diminutive man with a high-pitched voice, he stated, between protests from attendees, that the capital’s men had become effeminate. An indignant reply came from the crowd: “do you sleep every night in the Alameda?”¹³⁰

This barb skewered Uranga, building on both his own perceived effeminacy, as well as the common-knowledge of the park’s *ambiente*. Had it been true, he would have faced police

¹²⁷ Elissa J. Rashkin, *The Stridentist Movement in Mexico* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 146.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ This turmoil was in large part due to the assassination of president-elect Obregón the year before, ongoing tensions with Catholic groups, and the continued influence of ex-president Plutarco Calles, El Jefe Maximo. Ortíz Rubio would go on to win.

¹³⁰ Vito Alessio Robles, “Mis andanzas con nuestro Ulises,” *Jueves de Excelsior*, July 7, 1938.

roundups that would intensify as the state grew stronger in the early 1930s. For example, police detained four *afeminados* in their raids in late March 1930 in front of the Beethoven statue located between the Bellas Artes palace and the Alameda. The men included “El Chulo” (the handsome one), “La Negra Mala”, El Pelón (the bald one), and “La Chocatona.”¹³¹

The *El Nacional* article was part of an intensification of harsher press coverage of *afeminados*; of the many anti-homosexual articles that appeared thereafter, several referenced the Alameda. For example, on October 12, 1932, more “*afeminados sin pudor*” (shameless *afeminados*) were captured. “In different roundabouts in the Alameda,” reported *El Nacional*, “these types reunited and with unprecedented imprudence they dedicated themselves to amorous spasms, kissing with each other in the presence of peaceful pedestrians that were hurrying by.”¹³² Among those arrested included “El Novarro”, “María Conesa”, “Matilde Palou”, “Greta Garbo”, and “a further collection of these personalities who have long since renounced their manhood.” While the latter three chose feminine names related to national and international female entertainment stars, the first man chose El Novarro, a clear reference to the Mexican Hollywood star that showed his value as an icon. Following the roundup, the jails of the Jefatura de Policía overflowed with “lamentable and odious types” whose their tears smearing their makeup.¹³³ Despite raids, the park remained popular as a cruising site, which was attributable to both its central location and its secluded pathways. In April 1933, while interviewing *afeminados* in Lecumberri prison, journalist Miguel Gil observed that the men were more flamboyantly dressed than the average inmate. Inquiring if they would meet each other publicly dressed so, one man

¹³¹ “Afeminados,” *El Nacional*, March 24, 1930, sec. 1, 8. “El Chulo” was something that any man might have called himself, ironically or accurately. The article shows how within only a few years of its dedication, the statue had become a point of reference for queer Mexicans, whether more feminine or masculine in their self-presentation.

¹³² “Afeminados presos ayer en la Alameda,” *El Nacional*, October 13, 1932, sec. 1, 4.

¹³³ It is unclear if El Novarro himself was wearing the makeup. If he were, that would be an interesting juxtaposition between the nickname and the feminine persona, as well as perhaps a sly commentary on his homosexuality.

replied, “Of course! Almost daily we see each other in the Alameda.”¹³⁴ Similarly, in 1939, writer Eduardo Delhumeau stated the Alameda was “the favorite place of hundreds of *afeminados*.”¹³⁵ Based on this “common knowledge,” *Detectives* writer Jaime Luna set out to expose the Alameda’s homosexuals in October 1937. From afternoon until the early morning,

the Alameda Central is the customary refuge of pederasts and ‘hustlers’ that make it impossible to navigate at night through those parts, since the insinuations, the cries, the signals, the expressions, and obscene gestures of the swarming *afeminados* were intolerable to decent people.¹³⁶

Ironically—and humorously—when he entered the park looking for *afeminados*, the “famous degenerates who... ‘assault the unsuspecting passersby’ and make ‘shameful propositions’ to pedestrians didn’t appear anywhere.” Instead, he found only young straight couples, individuals sitting alone, and men having “esoteric discussions.” It is possible that repeated roundups had temporarily lessened the park’s desirability as a cruising site or that it was an off night for cruising. However, it is more likely that by looking for certain stereotypes—flamboyance and obscenities—Luna found nothing because he was unable to read the codes—perhaps in those “esoteric conversations”—between the men present. Moreover, if another man cruised Luna without a direct signal—such as through a “salted” glance—Luna missed it and its meaning.

Homosexual Social Sites and Barrios de Ambiente

Beyond the Alameda, there were numerous places a man could meet another man. Like swimming pools, gyms, and locker-rooms, cinemas provided opportunities for meeting other men. In April 1927, fifteen year-old Ricardo Reveles Guerrero was caught groping another man

¹³⁴ Miguel Gil, “Los neutros en la penitenciaría,” *Detectives*, April 24, 1933. Presumably they saw each other when they were not incarcerated. The man in question—Varita de Nardo—is the subject of a section below.

¹³⁵ The quote is originally from Delhumeau’s *Los mil y un pecados*, published by Ediciones Omega in 1939, and was quoted in Carlos Monsiváis, “Los iguales, los semejantes, los (hasta hace un minuto) perfectos desconocidos (A cien años de la Redada de los 41),” *Debate Feminista* 12, no. 24 (October 2001): 326.

¹³⁶ Jaime Luna, “Los homosexuales y las tribadas,” *Detectives*, October 25, 1937, 29-30.

in the Cine Montecarlo, a theater located near the Plaza Garibaldi in a neighborhood known for its *ambiente*.¹³⁷ Some cinemas would become famous for homosexual activity. By August 1931, the Politeama cinema, located on San Miguel street, had become a “Mecca for the *invertidos* who dwell in the southern part of our capital” due to the “repetition” of homosexual gatherings there.¹³⁸ Police arrested seven men, including “La Perla Negra” (Black Pearl), “El Pyjama”, “La Florera” (a feminized form of “vase”), “La Billetera” (the Wallet), Tortola Valencia, “Maria Tubau”, and “El no me olvides” (“Forget-me-not”).¹³⁹ At decade’s end the Politeama, San Juan de Létran, and Venecia cinemas—were “overflowing with *maricones*.”¹⁴⁰

In general, the 1920s and 1930s marked a period in which homosexuals, particularly those who adopted feminine personas, were increasingly visible. “These flaunt their aberration and are dressed as women, with plucked eyebrows, their hair with permanent waves,” reported *Detectives* magazine in 1937. From the tabloid’s perspective, the men had “by their own volition and inclination to vice had renounced their status as men, passing spontaneously to the phalanxes

¹³⁷ “Caja 1/233: Ricardo Reveles Guerrero,” April 1927, AGN, CTMI, Caja 1, Exp. 233. The Cine Montecarlo was a frequently ambiguous spot in terms of its location within sexual and gender normativity in the capital. Famed musician Agustín Lara played the theater, and his *boleros* have been described as allowing men to indulge their “feminine” side, at once not overtly a challenge to the cult of virility, but also not an exhortation of it either. See Salvador A Oropesa, “Popular Culture and Gender/Genre Construction in Mexican Bolero by Angeles Mastretta,” in *Bodies and Biases: Sexualities in Hispanic Cultures and Literatures*, ed. David William Foster and Roberto Reis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 151. In 1934, a group of male high-school students interrupted a film there in protest of sexual education in schools, the same year that strident attempts to remove homosexuals from government and to thwart Narciso Bassols’ tenure as Secretary of Education occurred. See Anne Rubenstein, “Raised Voices in the Cine Montecarlo: Sex Education, Mass Media, and Oppositional Politics in Mexico,” *Journal of Family History* 23, no. 3 (July 1, 1998): 312-323.

¹³⁸ “Redada de afeminados en un centrico cine,” *El Nacional*, August 13, 1931, 9.

¹³⁹ *El Nacional* hoped the men would be relegated to the Islas Mariás penal colony. As for the names, Carmen Tórtola Valencia (1882-1955) was a Spanish ballerina. “Tortola Valencia” may have been an aficionado of dance, like El Pavlova over a decade before. María Álvarez Tubau (1854-1914) was a Spanish actress. It is possible that the man arrested with such the nickname was older than his colleagues, as the actress had been dead seventeen years by the time of the roundup, or she may have remained culturally significant within the *ambiente* even nearly two decades later. “El Pyjama” may have been referencing the British spelling of the word “pajama” (Spanish *pijama*).

¹⁴⁰ See Delhumeau’s *Los mil y un pecados*, published by Ediciones Omega in 1939, quoted in Monsiváis, “Los iguales, los semejantes, los (hasta hace un minuto) perfectos desconocidos (A cien años de la Redada de los 41),” 326.

of homosexuality” in which they moved with “rhythmic gaits and manners.”¹⁴¹ Thus, rather than the “passive,” “colorless” homosexual neutrality asserted by Monico Neck, these homosexuals asserted their identity and assembled in “phalanxes,” a decidedly military formation.

Homosexuals could be found in certain areas of the capital more prominently than others, especially in working-class neighborhoods known for nightlife and sexual commerce. Two official *zonas de tolerancia* (red-light districts) were established by the late 1920s in areas to the north (between Colonia Guerrero and Colonia Centro, near Plaza Garibaldi) and to the south (the Barrio Latino/Cuauhtemotzín in Colonia Obrera) of the city center.¹⁴² The designation of these districts built upon established uses of the areas by prostitutes and businesses that used alcohol and sex as the engines of profitability. Many homosexuals worked in the area in 1937:

Homosexuals serve drinks in several houses of assignation, they exhibit themselves in a large, ramshackle house in Cuauhtemotzín, and they organize their dances, their “baptisms” and their initiations in shacks in the tenement house yards, and in elegant mansions; thus it should be noted that the infamous scourge equally abounds in our lower class as it does in the so-called high society.¹⁴³

While the “immense majority of the homosexuals of low state have sought refuge in the house of clandestine pleasure in which they present their services as ‘waitresses’ and ‘assistants’ (*recameras y ayudantas*)” others instead were known to “present another class of ‘services’ to determined clients more degenerate than themselves,” i.e., sex.¹⁴⁴ A photograph taken circa 1930 shows the interior of one house of ill-repute. A man plays the piano, on which sits an oriental-

¹⁴¹ Luna, “Los homosexuales y las tribadas.”

¹⁴² Both of these areas were named for prominent heroes in Mexican history; the presence of homosexuals in the neighborhoods is thus a great irony given the rhetoric used by nationalists against homosexuals. Cuauhtemotzín was initially the most infamous and populated; it was a site where sex was available in physical forms from other individuals, as well as in portable images, such as through the sale of erotic postage stamps and postcards hawked on the street.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 29.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 30. The use of these words is revealing on the status of the “third sex” in Mexico. *Recamarera* is interesting as it adds the ‘re’ to the front of the feminine *camarera* (waitress), in order to emphasize the difference of the men inhabiting their role, much in the way the quotes did likewise. Similarly, *ayudanta* is also made-up, in so far as it is a feminization of the word *ayudante* which could pertain to either sex

kitsch statuette of a woman. Next to him, in a flamboyant pose during a dance performance and smiling at the camera is “Manola”, dressed in a lacy shawl, dress, healed shoes, and makeup. Manola, was actually a man named Manolo.¹⁴⁵ Brothels and cabarets thus functioned as important contact zones between the *ambiente* and mainstream society. They offered sexual possibilities and employment to homosexuals as part of a broader pleasure-seeking social sphere that likewise provided other men the forbidden pleasures that the *afeminados* could provide.

Thus, whether or not red-light districts like Cuauhtemotzín and Garibaldi/Guerrero contained the “vast majority” of lower-class homosexuals, such districts did offer many benefits to working-class homosexuals. They could find positions as waiters and sex workers that allowed them to express their genders and sexualities openly. Men could also seek out sexual encounters within a liminal space in which sexual norms blurred; a man might go to the district in search of a prostitute, some dancing, and drinks, but instead, end up with the *afeminado* who flirted with him while tending his table or who paid for some food and drinks in exchange for sex. Middle-class and wealthier men took their rough-trade dates to the dance halls and cabarets in these areas. A popular spot was the Salón México, located at number 16 Pensador Mexicano street, near the corner with San Juan de Letrán and in the middle of the northern *zona de tolerancia*.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ The photograph, dated circa 1930, is from the Archivo Casasola, part of the Fototeca Nacional. It is reprinted in the appendix of Sergio González Rodríguez, *Los bajos fondos: El antro, la bohemia, y el café* (Mexico, D.F.: Cal y Arena, 1998).

¹⁴⁶ The Salón México, founded in April 1920, inspired US American composer Aaron Copland, who visited the site in the early 1930s, to compose a work by the same name. Famously guarded about his private life, Copland was himself a homosexual man, meaning that more than a fascination with the music of the area may have attracted him to the Salón, given its location in the city. For a biography of Copland, and information on his private life, see Howard Pollack, *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000). A 1949 film by the same name traces the experience of Mercedes, played by Marga Lopez, who dances with patrons at the salon in order to pay for her sister’s private-school education. Such efforts to care for the family, which in the real world often included sex, were common. See Katherine Elaine Bliss, *Compromised Positions: Prostitution, Public Health, and Gender Politics in Revolutionary Mexico City* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001).

Nandino took Francisco Sánchez there, where Sánchez loved to dance with the prostitutes.¹⁴⁷

Homosexual men also lived in or near the zones of tolerance, just as they had in earlier decades. In the north, Tiburcio Nava, “El Pelón” (the bald one), owned a guest-house at 81 Republica del Salvador.¹⁴⁸ In the south, homosexuals were even more visible.

in the blocks of Cuauhtemozín street there are various buildings in which the same occupy numerous accommodations; day and night one can see them as they descend and ascend the stairs, swinging their hips and intoning songs with women’s voices, powdered and caked with makeup. And it is curious that now the (female) sinners hang out there and socialize with them, considering that before, in other times, they hated them and acted out against them.¹⁴⁹

Delhumeau suggested, interestingly, a shift towards cordiality in relations between homosexuals and prostitutes, rather than the competitive atmosphere of earlier decades. Perhaps they realized they could make more money together. Or, maybe this rapprochement was because at least some *afeminados* saw themselves as women, and thus, “sisters” of a sort with the prostitutes. For example, in August 1937, police arrested around fifteen *afeminados* in the third block of Cuauhtemotzín street, where they had “devoted themselves to a veritable orgy, wearing feminine clothing.” These men, with “outrageous nerve, clarified in the Sixth Precinct that ‘they are women’ and that no one has the right to deprive them of ‘flaunting their charms.’”¹⁵⁰

However, neither the area near the Plaza Garibaldi nor Cuauhtemotzín were paradises; both could be dangerous. In early April 1932, Benjamín Moreno, known as “La Negra Consentida” and a cook in a *lonchería* at calle Organo no. 6-A (near Plaza Garibaldi), took two fierce blows to his head with a pipe from Rafael Vázquez Pardo.¹⁵¹ A week later, Moreno died,

¹⁴⁷ Nandino, *Juntando mis pasos*, 129.

¹⁴⁸ “Afeminados,” 8.

¹⁴⁹ The female “sinners” (*pecadoras*) are prostitutes, given the location. The quote is originally from Delhumeau’s *Los mil y un pecados*, published by Ediciones Omega in 1939, and was quoted in Monsiváis, “Los iguales, los semejantes, los (hasta hace un minuto) perfectos desconocidos (A cien años de la Redada de los 41),” 326.

¹⁵⁰ “Detenidos,” *El Nacional*, August 27, 1937. It is hard not to take the men at their word, insofar as their feminine self-presentation was integral to their identities, to the extent that they would risk showing their “nerve.”

¹⁵¹ “Herido con grueso tubo,” *El Nacional*, April 5, 1932, sec. 2, 1. His last name might have been “Romero,” given the sub-headline on the second article a week later; the main text of that article, however, calls him Moreno, while in

Vázquez (El Sardo) and his accomplice Faustino López Gómez (El Carrasco) were arrested in Colonia Obrera along with four others, and two policemen who had obstructed justice faced official reprimands.¹⁵² Articles reporting on the event vacillated between expressing some sympathy for Moreno to condemning him and the others as disgraceful *afeminados*.¹⁵³ What actually caused the attack was not clearly specified. However, the article is an example of an emerging discursive trend: homosexuals were, or were involved with, criminals. Both Vázquez and López were alternately referred to as *invertidos* and as *hampones* (criminal thugs).¹⁵⁴

Cuauhtemocztín could also be dangerous, particularly given the combination of alcohol and sexual passions that permeated the neighborhood. On April 22, 1938, *El Nacional* reported that the *afeminado* Juan Martínez Campos, aka “Joan of Arc” had shot one Ricardo Trujillo in the face, gravely wounding him, while in a “complete state of inebriety.” Martínez Campos was arrested and sent to Lecumberri prison, while Trujillo was sent to the nearest hospital.¹⁵⁵

In general, however, the sites offered a festive location for both sexes to mingle, including with their own sex. The painting *La calle de Cuauhtemotzín* (1941), by homosexual Mexican artist Emilio Baz Viaud, illustrates this atmosphere: two men walk down a street lined with colorfully-dressed prostitutes showing off their wares. The taller man rests his hand on his partner’s shoulders as they at the women. In the distance, people dance in a cantina.¹⁵⁶

Baz Viaud’s painting has been previously evaluated in terms of its queer potential by Rudi Bleys in his excellent *Images of Ambiente*, but Bleys downplayed the significance of the

the original article it calls him Benjamin Nol. I have used Moreno since it appeared in the main text of the second article. In all of them, his first name is Benjamin.

¹⁵² Calle Organo was famous for prostitution during the period. See Armando Jiménez, *Lugares de gozo, retozo, ahogo y desahogo en la Ciudad de México* (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Oceano de México, 2000).

¹⁵³ Presumably they were of a more masculine type given the lack of descriptions of their appearances and the assailants’ nicknames; it cannot be assumed that all *afeminados* in the *zonas* thought of themselves as “women.”

¹⁵⁴ “Los asesinos de un afeminado aprehendidos en esta ciudad,” *El Nacional*, April 11, 1932, 1.

¹⁵⁵ “Herido en la cara,” *El Nacional*, April 22, 1938, sec. 1.

¹⁵⁶ Emilio Baz Viaud, *La calle de Cuauhtemotzín*, Tempura and dry brush on poster board, 1941.

two men's interaction, stating there was "no connection to be read with homosexuality" because it was an "obvious sign of camaraderie and male bonding" still practiced today. Instead, the painting offered a "multiplicity of meanings," including any that a homosexual viewer would have experienced through fantasies about straight men and male-male intimacy.¹⁵⁷

However, when viewed with period photographs and in light of Cuauhtemocztín's status as an *ambiente* site, the men's interaction could signify more than homosocial bonding. What is fascinating is that while both men are looking at the prostitutes, they are *walking past* them at an angle.¹⁵⁸ Intriguingly, the taller man displays signs that he might not have been so straight after all. His style is quite different than his companion's: he wears a tight-fitting, striped shirt, rather than the looser-fitting shirt of his friend, and his gray pants, held up with suspenders, are of a finer cut than his friend's overalls. His hair also is curly, probably permed, while his friend wears a ball cap. Finally, he has a pink handkerchief in his back pocket that in the shape of a flower, a familiar symbol of homosexual males. This combination of these traits mirror how homosexual men looked in a 1935 photo: several of the men wear tighter shirts; one even has thin stripes like that of the taller man in the painting. More than one have styled their hair in a curly fashion, and at least two of them are wearing suspenders.¹⁵⁹ Several are camping it up for the camera.

The painting, then, contained more meaning for homosexuals than simple fantasies. The two men appear to be enjoying the street in much the same way that Nandino did with his youthful companions: a night on the town to drink, dance, and flirt with prostitutes, followed by the two men leaving together. Or, since Cuauhtemocztín also offered rentable rooms for sex, the

¹⁵⁷ Bleys, *Images of Ambiente*, 106.

¹⁵⁸ Other possibilities: they are heading to the tavern in the distance where another man peers inside, although that too is not directly in front of them. Perhaps they are merely window-shopping, then, or on the first pass to scope out the potential partners while gauging their financial resources, but again, this seems less likely than a queer reading.

¹⁵⁹ Inventario 6631, "Homosexuales detenidos en una comisaria, retrato de grupo." Ca. 1935, Fototeca Nacional, Judiciales, Detenidos, no. 6631. The photo, of men at a police precinct, was taken by the Casasola family.

taller man might have been a prostitute himself steering the youth towards one of these.

Throughout the 1930s, Mexican officials at local and national levels sought to regulate and eventually eliminate the *zonas de tolerancia* like the one Baz Viaud painted. Ironically, the presence of homosexual men in cabarets during the 1930s may stem in part due to the economic opportunities opened by regulation. For example, in 1931, the Departamento del Distrito Federal issued its Reglamento de Cafés Cantantes, Cabarets y Salones de Baile; this regulation prohibited women from working in bars, and women could only be present in bars in the company of men. This threatened the business models upon which sites that sold alcohol depended, especially those that used *ficheras*, or socializing waitresses to generate more business and those that contained illicit rooms for sex outside of the surveillance applied to formal prostitution.¹⁶⁰ While eventually disregarded by owners and employees, the legislation enabled opportunities for homosexuals because while biologically male, they could still perform feminine gender roles. Both the area around the Plaza Garibaldi and the northern section of Colonia Obrera would remain areas of the *ambiente* in the next decade.¹⁶¹

In 1938, the Departamento del Distrito Federal decided to dismantle the zones of tolerance.¹⁶² As part of this process, the area immediately around Cuauhtemotzín would be reconfigured through urban planning: the street was extended and widened, destroying the buildings that housed the brothels, and the street's name was changed to Fray Cervando Teresa de Mier. Prostitution itself would be abolished in 1940, at least in terms of the state removing its role in regulating the “immoral” trade. Instead, the state criminalized the transmission of disease

¹⁶⁰ Bliss, *Compromised Positions*, 173-174.

¹⁶¹ Moreover, the appearance by the 1940s of cabarets staffed entirely by men—many appearing in feminine attire—may be a further outgrowth of these social reforms the decade before. Obrera was where the *ambiente* went after Cuauhtemotzín's demise. One cantina known as “La Lucha” is the centerpiece of Chapter 7. Baz Viaud's painting portrayed a world that would be dramatically changed, and it may in fact show his nostalgia for the way things were.

¹⁶² This end was related to a moralization campaign; these would be repeated every so often for decades, leading to spikes in arrests and increased press coverage on both prostitution and homosexuality.

as “crimes of contagion”, which could apply to both men and women.¹⁶³ The abolition of prostitution was a potent attempt at eliminating concentrated sexual commerce on the grounds of public health and hygiene, Mexico’s international reputation, and the fulfillment of Revolutionary ideas of equality. The closing of cabarets, brothels, and the zones of tolerance threatened the economic livelihoods of *ficheras*, female prostitutes, and homosexuals alike.

However, if the goal was to eliminate sexual commerce and disrupt social practices built on sex, then that failed. Like previous attempts to control the erotic revolution, this attempt resulted in a contested, temporary outcome. Entrepreneurs, sex workers, and homosexuals asserted gendered, sexualized citizenship at an everyday level that coalesced into new venues for nightlife, entertainment, and sexual expression. They responded to pressures from political, juridical, and medical authorities by shifting their businesses and cultures to other areas of the city, reopening closed areas, and serving a market undaunted by the moralization campaigns.

In addition, homosexuals and prostitutes remained in Cuauhtemotzín for some time after the new laws and physical changes went into effect. In 1940, their presence upset the Barrio Latino’s more “honorable” residents. In a letter to President Lázaro Cárdenas in 1940, nearly one hundred male and female tenants, “honorable workers” and their families, property-owners, and entrepreneurs derided the “shameful spectacle” prostitutes made in front of the Edificio Cuauhtemotzín, as well as having to share space with them because the building’s owner rented them rooms. The concerned denizens implored Cárdenas to act and to “definitively order that all prostitutes and homosexuals be removed from the prohibited zone.”¹⁶⁴ This was necessary because the new zoning and deregulation of prostitution had, instead of eliminating the zone of

¹⁶³ For more on the abolition of Cuauhtemotzín, see Chapter Six of Bliss, *Compromised Positions*. See also Jiménez, *Lugares de gozo*, 199-203. The street’s name had already been changed by the 1947-1948 version of the Guía Roji street guide. For comparison, see a map of the area in 1929, see Bliss, *Compromised Positions*, 160.

¹⁶⁴ “Inquilinos, et al to Cárdenas,” 1940, AGN, Administración Pública de la República, Lázaro Cárdenas, file 525.3/1. Cited in *Ibid.*, 208.

tolerance, pushed sexual commerce directly into the streets, making it more visible.¹⁶⁵ Rather than eliminating the need for moralization campaigns, the laws made them more necessary.

Homosexual Ruffians, Armed and Dangerous

Some *afeminados* found in the working-class areas resisted these efforts to regulate them and also thwarted stereotypes of *afeminados* as weak and timid beings. For example, in April 1925, a man named Rodolfo Quintana wanted to converse with his friends in the *pulquería* La Estocada at the corner of Constancia and Tenoxtitlán streets in Tepito.¹⁶⁶ However, the outing was disrupted when the aptly, if not originally, nicknamed *afeminado* “El Joto” arrived and began making unwelcome flirtatious comments. Quintana rebuffed these with a “stout insolence,” a mistake he would not soon forget. As he left the *pulquería*, El Joto pounced, stabbing him with a dagger and hurrying away. The wounded man was taken to the hospital in grave condition.¹⁶⁷

In the bar, El Joto enacted a common process that men-on-the-make did with their objects of affection; however, these flirtatious comments (*priopos*) generally occurred men and women. In this way, he had played the “masculine” role by objectifying Quintana, rather than the “feminine” role expected of an *afeminado*, and when that desire went unfulfilled, El Joto took the further “active” step of assaulting the other. He had, in other words, queered the heteronormative way *priopos* functioned, thereby effeminizing Quintana. He had, surprising,

¹⁶⁵ In parallel to the increased visibility of female prostitutes on the streets after deregulation—because they were no longer bound by a specific, regulated area—homosexuals would become even more prominent in the 1940s and 1950s, and in response, new rounds of moralization campaigns would target sex and behaviors like alcohol consumption that were deemed as gateways to perversion. The increasingly vigorous attempts to repress the capital’s sexual cultures—and that of the nation itself—would only increase. These would serve as catalysts, along with increasing repression directed at students and workers, for the tumultuous struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, many of which were as much about gender and sexuality as they were about politics and culture.

¹⁶⁶ Tepito, an often-dangerous neighborhood north of the Centro known for its informal markets and tenements, was also a site in which *afeminados* lived and worked.

¹⁶⁷ “Afeminado convertido en rufian,” *El Democrata*, April 26, 1925, 11. The article was part of a larger “Archivo de la delincuencia” section. We are left to wonder if Quintana’s behavior was in part a response to the presence of his friends with him in a public space.

converted into a “ruffian” reported *El Democrata*. A few months later, an *afeminado* named Eucario Huerta Gayoso, apprehended in the capital’s Mercado de “el Volador” for “committing immoralities,” shot his police captor three times on Argentina street; the wounded policeman, in turn, returned fire, and Huerta was expected to die of his wounds.¹⁶⁸ The incident made the cover page of the Monterrey-based paper *El Porvenir*. Neither of these incidents supported the idea that *afeminados* were weak and passive, but they did support ideas of homosexuals as “passionate” criminals, a characteristic that itself was ambiguously gendered.

Such outbursts of aggression stunned observers, who were not expecting “masculine” behaviors from *afeminados*. Take for example the case of El Barrigón, an *afeminado* well-known to police. In 1932, he was apprehended fighting with a good-looking, sixteen year-old “lad.”¹⁶⁹ Both were taken to jail, but during rounds, a policeman found El Barrigón in the lad’s cell in a compromising “position.” The policeman, indignant with what he saw, charged El Barrigón, expecting that given “his homosexual condition it would be easy to dominate him.” However, “it was no small surprise when the *afeminado* energetically repelled the aggression and taking a knife threw himself against the policeman,” who then had to use his pistol to save his life.¹⁷⁰

The policeman’s surprise at El Barragón’s resistance stemmed from his assumption that homosexuals were not masculine; indeed, this assumption was bolstered by El Barragón’s implied passivity in sex, a sexual role that did not square with the way his virility exerted itself. This led the article’s author then makes an unexpected conclusion: it was

¹⁶⁸ “Un afeminado hirió a un agente de Policía,” *El Porvenir*, September 6, 1925, 1.

¹⁶⁹ The term used was *mozalbeta*, which often carried extra meaning of someone from the lower classes, and in this case a “street urchin.” That author Jaime Luna also commented on the lad’s attractiveness is amusing—was it to lure readers in with perverse thoughts?

¹⁷⁰ Green describes a similar circumstance where a homosexual surprises others with his aggression and self-defense, as well as his apparently contradictory images of himself. Police again thought that since he was a homosexual he could not adequately defend himself. See the discussion of “Madame Satã” in Green, *Beyond Carnival*, 85-92.

unquestionable that among these beings abounds those in which at the bottom of their physical complex are still conserved virile characteristics, which in critical moments impetuously reemerge in their personality, and these convert them into true men, who in fights and revenge turn into truly dangerous 'biological unities.'¹⁷¹

Thus an *afeminado*'s body was a mutable site from which virility could unexpectedly spring forth. This, combined with homosexuals' alleged lack of "attachment" to life and disrespect for "the institutions of a society which has excluded them from its breast," made them dangerous:

In the moments when they feel their pride is offended or when they must defend the favorite (man) of their whims, they turn into bold opponents that must be punished, in most cases with criminal penalties, since the fights between them generally lead to people being killed, wounded, or 'marked' in the face, all actions classified as offenses.

If anything, this analysis points to the popularization of the multiplicity of overlapping ideas about homosexuality's origins, how it could be recognized, and whether or not it was an inherent quality or something socially produced. Moreover, this was a "typical case;" if so, there was a cognitive incongruence between stereotypes and reality, and a tension between masculinity as a mutable quality and the permanence of some virile kernel that could survive even degeneration. In other words, there was something "real" in every man. This tension would continue and referenced circulating scientific ideas. Yet, also encapsulated in the tension expressed in each of these three articles, was the coalescing stereotype of homosexuals as perpetrators of "passionate" crimes. The stereotype hinged on beliefs that homosexuals could lash out with jealous aggression should they be spurned. This did happen, but the stereotype would soon outstrip reality.¹⁷²

IV. Life Behind the "Mask of Justice": Homosexual Prison Life, 1920-1940

Of course, not all *afeminados* were successful in resisting arrest. Although sodomy had been decriminalized in 1871, authorities levied charges of "moral outrages" homosexuals. When

¹⁷¹ Luna, "Los homosexuales y las tribadas."

¹⁷² This stereotype would provide an opportunity for police to "blame the victim," particularly as police corruption, already a problem before mid-century, became an increasing concern among the populace.

arrested, men faced potential time in the Carcél de la Ciudad (the Carmen jail), imprisonment in Lecumberri, or relegation to the Islas Mariás colony. Piecing together what these men's lives were like is challenging, particularly given the spottiness of remaining files. However, glimpses do remain in published studies conducted during the period, pseudo-ethnographic periodical articles, and in texts from observers whose lives intersected with those of the men incarcerated.

One was Concepción Acevedo de la Llata, a Catholic nun known as “Madre Conchita” and accomplice of José de León Toral, Álvaro Obregón assassin in July 1928.¹⁷³ In the aftermath, police arrested her, and imprisoned her in Lecumberri before her relegation to the Islas Mariás in 1929.¹⁷⁴ There, she wrote her memoirs, and described the “sad things” she saw in prison, including the “scandalous *afeminados*” who were there to be “regenerated”:

They are provided female costumes, powder, rouge, blush, and they give the theater performances; moreover, Bataclan is frequently demanded of them, and in general it seemed to me (I don't vote) that there are some very sad, very amoral things here, something that I never suspected existed.¹⁷⁵

The claim is striking: within Lecumberri, *afeminados* not only directed performances of racy dancing styles, but also were provided with various feminine accoutrements to enable their work. Such performances had the prison authorities' approval and were popular with the other inmates, suggesting that the *afeminados* played an important role in the prison's social life.

On September 29, 1900, Porfirio Díaz and the Porfirian elite inaugurated the penitentiary as a symbol of Mexico's “arrival as a civilized nation” and the regime's commitment to order.¹⁷⁶

The prison remained in use after the Revolution, and as early as the 1920s, *afeminados* were part

¹⁷³ The assassination occurred during the height of the tumultuous Cristero counter-revolution (1926-1929),

¹⁷⁴ Madre Conchita had been a force in inciting the assassin to kill Obregón during the. Her role in the assassination caused a sensation in the Mexican press, and a fascination with her life would continue for years, resulting in various articles on and interviews with her, as people wanted to know her perspectives.

¹⁷⁵ Acevedo y de la Llata (Madre Conchita), *Memorias inéditas*, 61-62.

¹⁷⁶ For a detailed history of the processes leading up to the prison, as well as the debates on prison reform in the period and following the Revolution, see Robert M. Buffington, *Criminal and Citizen in Modern Mexico* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 2000). The quote above is from page 96.

of the prison population. In his groundbreaking and award-winning study *El problema sexual del hombre en la penitenciaría* (1933), psychiatrist Raul González Enríquez described how by 1923, the “Penitentiary collected the largest number of homosexuals and then, when there were dances among the inmates, the sexual market was of the greatest importance.”¹⁷⁷ By 1926, there were “more than forty” housed in what would later become the pharmacy:

And the spectacle could be seen of a zone of tolerance patrolled by a multitude of daily and accidental solicitants that remembered that sexuality is not reproduction, and that the individual force can be superior to that of the species.¹⁷⁸

Part of González’s motivation for his study was to understand the “sexual market” and “zone of tolerance” that were present in the prison, as well as find methods of countering the “sexual problem” men faced in isolation. This was a problem that would vex other reformers.

Criminologist Raúl Carrancá y Trujillo, for example, interviewed two inmates—middle-class Antonio, in jail on robbery charges, and working-class Juan, in jail for homicide—on their sexual lives. Carrancá noted that men without access to conjugal visits turned to “onanism” and “shameless” encounters with “*afeminados* who are in cells 56, 58, and 60 of a certain cellblock.” These men were recognized by other inmates, according to Juan and Antonio, through manner of walking and speaking, as well as their “dress, makeup, and nicknames like ‘La Eva,’ ‘La Miss México,’ La Morena (Brunette), La Bárbara Lamar, [and] La Cebollera (Onion peeler).”¹⁷⁹ Sometimes the “active” paid for sex and others the “passive” paid; sex also occurred because of friendliness or the “energetic impression” a *macho* made on the *joto*. Men had sex during film screenings or when the *jotos* talked to men about their laundry, which the *jotos* washed. Carrancá

¹⁷⁷ Raul González Enríquez, *El problema sexual del hombre en la penitenciaría* (Mexico: Editorial Citlaltépetl, 1971), 104. In 1933, a favorable review appeared in the article “¡Doña Juanita!” (slang for marijuana) published in *Detectives* magazine in December, and in 1942, it won the Miguel Lanz Duret prize.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 104-105.

¹⁷⁹ Raúl Carrancá y Trujillo, “Sexo y Penal,” *Criminalia*, no. 2 (October 1933): 9-11. Barbara La Marr (1896-1926) was an American stage and film actress, cabaret artist, and screenwriter known as the “Girl Who Is Too Beautiful.” Carrancá’s article mentions one other man—La Gloria—who had just been sent to the Islas Marías.

concluded sexual satisfaction was not an “unnecessary luxury” but an “imperious need,” and without legitimate outlets, men would view homosexuality as “normal.”¹⁸⁰ Yet, as the quotes above show, prison officials did not always take the problem seriously, seeing homosexuals as a partial “solution” for the sexual problem, even if they exacerbated fighting between men.

Los Neutros in Lecumberri

In April 1933 journalist Miguel Gil wrote an article about the “neuters”—i.e., *afeminados*—in Lecumberri prison who were “neither male nor female.” Gil’s piece reflected understandings of homosexuals as an intersexual “third sex.”¹⁸¹ Accompanying Gil to the prison was photographer Enrique Díaz; his photos would influence how security tabloids presented homosexuality to their readership, as photos would be reused in future stories separate from the original.¹⁸²

Entering Crujia A (cellblock ‘A’), Gil and Díaz encountered resistance from the *afeminados*, who became “worked-up” at the thought of their portraits being taken.¹⁸³ La Yucateca stated that he did not want them to destroy his future. “No, no, no!” others shouted, “better that you kill us...take our portrait? Never!”¹⁸⁴ Gil then tried to reason with them, referring to them as “lads.” La Yucateca responded incredulously that there were not lads there and asked, “can’t you see that we are women?” In sum, Gil sought to view the men through his lens of deviancy as men who had fallen into femininity. Instead, the men rejected his assertions,

¹⁸⁰ His fascinating suggestion was to have men work to get money to pay prostitutes for satisfaction.

¹⁸¹ It could be argued that his piece also foreshadowed Monico Neck’s assertions of homosexual neutrality and political hermaphroditism discussed in Chapter 3.

¹⁸² Díaz was another of the famous cohort of photojournalists and photochroniclers working in Mexico at the time.

¹⁸³ Contrary to popular belief, the homosexuals, at least during the 1920s and 1930s, were not housed in “Crujia ‘J’” (cellblock ‘J’), which both some scholars and activists have claimed was the origin of the term *joto*, a masculinized version of *jota*, or “j”. Robert Buffington has countered these claims by showing that the term *joto* has a much longer legacy to it, meaning the added significance in prison was added later. See chapter 6, note 25 in Buffington, *Criminal and Citizen*, 207-208. Indeed, Gil described the *neutros* as being in Crujia A, while González located them in Crujia B. See Gil, “Los neutros en la penitenciaría”; González Enríquez, *El problema sexual*, 104.

¹⁸⁴ La Yucateca may have been from the Yucatán or the name may have been an ironic reference to the previous practice of sending homosexuals and travestis to the peninsula.

claiming an identity based on their own understanding of gender trumping biology.¹⁸⁵

Like their counterparts outside of prison, the men adopted feminine names. Besides La Yucateca, there was Mimí Derba, a “robust subject, olive-skinned, of hard features and wide nose” who bore a passing resemblance to the starlet, and Eva Beltri, who likewise was named for a star and who wore a bandana when posing for his portrait, staring towards the sky so that his eyes—framed by plucked eyebrows and mascara on his eye-lids—would feature.¹⁸⁶ Other men, feminized their appearance wearing bandanas or handkerchiefs on their heads, and some utilized baggier pants. Some wore aprons, used feminine blouses, or wore other forms of makeup.¹⁸⁷

The scene in Gil’s article has a zoo-like quality: the journalist and photographer want *the afeminados* to show off for a public disposed to mock and ridicule them. This effort shows the market for perversity. Yet, the article also provides a small archive of the men’s lives, as well as moments where both journalist and reader may have felt surprising sympathy for the men.

Varita de Nardo / “A Little Sprig of Nardo”

For example, one *afeminado* went by the name “Varita de Nardo.” Gil described him as shamelessly casting half-closed eyes like a “married girl” at them while stating his name. “Are you content to be like that,” Gil. “And what would you have me do?” Varita de Nardo replied, “Or do you think I’m at fault?”¹⁸⁸ That comment gave Gil pause, one that he passed on to his readers: “it’s true: what fault do these beings have, having been born incomplete?” While Gil’s

¹⁸⁵ Today, we might use the term “transgender” to refer to these men.

¹⁸⁶ This photograph would appear several times in print, reused because of its striking character and the attractiveness of “Eva Beltri”, as well as the way he encapsulated stereotypes of male sexual deviancy. What is more, later this photo would appear as an example of a lesbian. Eva may have been the *afeminado* that Carrancá y Trujillo mentioned caused a fight between two prisoners in 1933.

¹⁸⁷ Photos of lineups that appeared with the story showed men wearing skirts and others wearing hats and/or more masculine clothing, while still wearing makeup. While some men in the photos demurred or positioned themselves so that they were partially obscured, most posed for the cameraman, casting amused, even flirtatious glances at the camera, almost as if they dared the photographer or his audience to succumb.

¹⁸⁸ Gil, “Los neutros en la penitenciaría.” Gil would go on to write a two-volume exposé of the Islas Marías penal colony after Madre Conchita went there; he also engaged with homosexuals on the island. See Chapter 5.

comment was not that Varita de Nardo was “normal” and incorporated scientific discourses stating that homosexuals were not fully developed, it also contained a tinge of compassion, thereby leaving the door for the reader to also reflect on the societal status of queer men.¹⁸⁹

For the photos “Varita de Nardo” preferred to fix himself up and to pose in a domestic scene, ironing a shirt. “Oh, if only we had women’s clothing!” he told Gil, “Then we would be more complete!” His photo was taken in a cell with Eva Beltri and two others—Barbara la Mar and la Yucateca—in the photo. On the wall, a print of flowers in a vase completed the domestic scene, showing the personal attention *afeminados* used in making their cells more “livable.”

González also described Varita de Nardo, remarking that he, whose actual initials were “J. B.,” showed the classic characteristics of a homosexual. “The activities of homosexuals cannot cease in reclusion,” he wrote, because “a series of experiences have shaped their lives,” making it impossible for them to be without “erotic swinging,” particularly when inside the prison the “law of supply and demand, that governs social phenomena like prostitution, continues.”¹⁹⁰ To support his point, González made note of the twenty-eight year-old’s history: “intense and precocious sexual life” that started “brutally early” and included his “deflowering” at ten years old by his uncle in which he lived for a year and a half, a man he greatly love for because he was “sweet, kind, and caring, but who nevertheless left him without a cause.” After being abandoned, Varita de Nardo headed into the streets “not to obtain affection but instead money, which he achieves sufficiently.” In his “tormented sexual life”—this was González’s description—Varita de Nardo had fourteen lovers, of which he only loved three during his “first

¹⁸⁹ This was seemingly a formative experience for Gil, as his later exposé on the Islas Mariás also contained sympathetic commentary on homosexuals, not just sensationalism.

¹⁹⁰ González Enríquez, *El problema sexual*, 110. The book was originally published in 1933 and it was awarded a national prize, the Miguel Lanz Duret, in 1942. It is likely that both Gill and González described the same person, given that the latter was writing his study prison sexuality at the same time as Gil’s article; a glowing review of his book appeared in *Detectives* magazine in 1933.

steps on the rough path” (*senda escabrosa*) from age ten to fifteen.¹⁹¹ According to González, Varita de Nardo was a “*joto bien*,” i.e., from a wealthier background and that’s why he was isolated away from others with similar stories who had been swept up in police raids on brothels. Varita de Nardo’s ideal was a “strong man”, and he hoped to find the most masculine that he could and, “if possible, a brute.” “He is a fortunate one in the presidio, González asserted:

With his manicured feet, in slippers and wrapped in a coat that cinches by hand, he strolls, really shows-off his indolence from his cell to the sun, in which he sits himself down to watch the hours pass.¹⁹²

Nevertheless, Varita de Nardo was a product of his early life and a warning to reformers on the dangers of youth delinquency and sexual precocity.

The nickname “Varita de Nardo” merits further description. The phrase stems from the night-blooming flowering plant *Polianthes tuberosa*—in English, the tuberose—native to Mexico and typified by its intense fragrance, beautiful and delicate white flowers, and tall, slender stalks.¹⁹³ From the plant’s stalks, beauty, and erect, straight stature, the phrase *tan flacas como varitas de nardo* (as skinny as tuberoses), takes its origin; thus, “Varita de Nardo” is a nickname referencing the man’s slenderness and beauty.¹⁹⁴

Beyond the actual description, Varita de Nardo’s name referenced the song “Varita de Nardo”, composed by famous Mexican actor, writer, director, comedian, and composer Joaquín Pardave Arce (1900-1955) in 1928 in honor of his wife Soledad Rebollo. The song remained popular for years, and has covered by numerous Mexican singers and musical groups in the

¹⁹¹ Also means “sordid” or “thorny” path.

¹⁹² Ibid., 111.

¹⁹³ *Nardo* (or *varita de nardo*, literally spike or wand of *nardo*) is one of the plants that was taken from the New World and integrated through the Columbian Exchange into other cultures. It is used for perfumes around the world, as well as a ceremonial flower in countries like India. Several species of *Polianthes*, exist; all are native to Mexico. The plant should not be confused with another strong-smelling plant common in perfumes, the Spikenard (*Nardostachys* sp.), a native of India and Nepal and member of the Valerian family. In Spanish, this plant is known as *espicanardo*.

¹⁹⁴ As befitting his name, a photo accompanying Gil’s story shows “Varita de Nardo” to be a slender man.

following decades. Juan Arvizu was one of (if not the) first to record it in May 1928 in Mexico City as a solo with the Orquesta Típica under the direction of A. Esparza Oteo and published by Brunswick Records.¹⁹⁵ At the beginning of the 1930s, the Mexican government, like other Latin American governments, utilized radio broadcasting as a means for “creating and disseminating a national culture.”¹⁹⁶ 1930 also marked the birth of Mexico’s first commercial radio station, XEW. It is possible then that Varita de Nardo heard the song on the radio or a record of it played, as his name suggests participation in the emerging radio culture at the time.

The nickname “Varita de Nardo” also appears in Guadalupe Marín’s novel *La única* (1938). The novel is, according to scholar Salvador Oropesa, an “autobiographical text in which, through the character of Marcela, Lupe Marín tries to explain her version of the truth to the public.” This “truth” included her denunciation of what she saw as “the most important problems in Mexican society: homosexuality, communism, machismo (including battered wives), state misogyny, underdevelopment, lack of a real division between political powers (legislative, executive, and judicial), the arbitrary nature of justice, and the lack of citizenship for women.”¹⁹⁷ In the novel, Marcela both criticizes Andrés, who represented her husband Jorge Cuesta and “outs” her husband as a member of a queer *circulo mágico* (magical circle), i.e. the queer

¹⁹⁵ This is one of the first, if not the first, song recorded in Mexico. [Brunswick Records: Chicago and regional sessions, Ross Laird, Brunswick-Balke-Collender Company, Brunswick Radio Corporation] volum 3 of ML156.2 L35B7

¹⁹⁶ On radio in Mexico, see Joy Elizabeth Hayes, “National Imaginings on the Air: Radio in Mexico, 1920-1950,” in *The Eagle and the Virgin: National and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, ed. Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 243-258; Joy Elizabeth Hayes, *Radio Nation: Communication, Popular Culture, and Nationalism in Mexico, 1920-1950* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000). For examples of the use of the radio and music as a means of generating nationalism in other Latin American nations, see for example Bryan McCann, *Hello, Hello Brazil: Popular Music in the Making of Modern Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Peter Wade, *Music, Race, and Nation: Musica Tropical in Colombia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); and Hermano Vianna, *The Mystery of Samba: Popular Music and National Identity in Brazil* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

¹⁹⁷ Oropesa, *The Contemporáneos Group*, 100.

members of Contemporáneos who education secretary Narciso Bassols (1931-1934) protected.¹⁹⁸

Varita de Nardo was one with him he went out every night to cabarets.¹⁹⁹

Kinship Among Afeminados, High and Low

Varita de Nardo had begun his homosexual life as a young man on the streets. From the perspective of Mexican authorities, this was where great damage could be done to youth. Yet, for homosexuals, the street could also be a site of belonging where kinship developed across class lines. Fourteen year-old Pablo Ayala García appeared before the Tribunal de Menores in June 1927, having been apprehended “with signs of sexual degeneration” near the intersection of Magnolia and Galeana streets, just north of the Paseo de La Reforma and just west of the Plaza Garibaldi. Pablo, known as “La Israela”, had, according to his social interview, spent the previous four years among “all the *afeminados* that there are in this capital” and thus had acquired their habits.²⁰⁰ Days before his apprehension, he was living with an individual known as “la Pelona” (the bald one), while the day police picked him up he had gotten drunk.²⁰¹

Six previous times, he had been brought before various officials and had been released after paying the requisite fine. He had also escaped from the Tribunal, heading back into the street where he resumed his “previous life in front of the Alameda.” This life involved turning tricks to earn money, no less than five pesos a day. According to a medical evaluation, he showed signs of “passive sexual degeneration” that he did not deny, and he admitted to two term lovers and “an infinity of lovers,” which made him one of the “best in his profession.” In the

¹⁹⁸ As Oropesa notes, *circulo mágico* referred both in general to sex between men, as well as specifically to the group that Bassols protected. Marín must have been frustrated that both of her husbands turned out as less than what she wanted—her first was Rivera.

¹⁹⁹ Guadalupe Marín, *La única* (Mexico: Editorial Jalisco, 1938), 203. Is this the same Varita de Nardo who was imprisoned? It is possible, given that he was a “good” *joto* and that the events of the novel took place in the same period and coincided with Bassols’s tenure as secretary.

²⁰⁰ Ayala García’s nickname is fascinating—was he connected in some way to the Jewish faith?

²⁰¹ “Case File 1/429: Pablo Ayala Garcia.”

Casa de Observación, he was seen as a “pederast” who “greatly likes to mix with the girls who he treats with delicateness, helping them with their chores.” In fact, he only wanted to cook, clean, and iron, which the observer noted “he does rather well.” Pablo also knew how sew.

The most interesting part of the case actually related to his friends on the street. After Pablo’s apprehension, police then attempted to roundup his counterparts, lovers, and clients. Some sixty *afeminados* were brought before officials, and they remained free after paying their fine. Among the men were two classes: *alta* (high-class)—including men with college degrees, doctors, and journalists—and *rebozo* (low-class, from the style of shawl they wore). Remarkably, the classes mixed in their social spaces and the wealthier ones came to the aid of the poorer to pay their fines, a clear sign of kinship or community between the men unbounded by class. Because many of the men had influence, they had blunted the roundup and its aims.

For critics like Jaime Luna, such men were among the elite predators:

The *invertidos* pertaining to the elevated classes are those that in the luxury cinemas, the famous bars, and in the posh cabarets, are dedicated to hunting men, especially the youths of virile attraction, that through inexperience or suggestion are the propitiatory victims of the audacious and cynical ‘seductors’.²⁰²

Despite this critique, the irony remained that those deemed socially or congenitally “weak” and non-virile were paradoxically those who were thought could effect such drastic degradation of youth and get away with it because of their influence and wealth.

In the Carmen Jail

As the earlier sections mentioned, some homosexuals were fined or spent a shorter time in the dangerous Carmen jail. In April 1938, two *invertidos* “provoked a grand scandal in the interior of cell-block ‘J’” when Francisco Lugo Rico, an English teacher detained for “debauchery,” “spilt

²⁰² Luna, “Los homosexuales y las tribadas.”

hot coffee” on Ignacio Ramírez Ríos. Ramírez responded by attacking Lugo with a stick, gravely slicing his forehead, which earned him time in Lecumberri.²⁰³ Then, in September 1939, two homosexual men—Guillermo Vélez Jara (aka, “Santa”) and José Aguilar Bonilla (“Amapola del Camino”)—had an altercation within the jail.²⁰⁴ Vélez, nineteen, bit Aguilar in the face after the other had made a joke about him. The act resulted in his remittance to Lecumberri.”²⁰⁵

In jail, men also tried to flout the system. Román Tellez Tellez, known as La Chaparra (a feminized “shorty”), tried to smuggle marijuana to José Hernández (La Morena). However, the cell-block guard caught them, thwarting the attempt.²⁰⁶ Interestingly, *El Nacional* described the men as *pícaros* (rogues) and repeat offenders netted during the capital’s anti-vice campaigns. Press reports rarely used the term *pícaro* to describe *afeminados*, and its use may suggest that the men were more masculine in their appearance, as well as “roguish” criminals.²⁰⁷

V: The Allure of the Perverse, the “Third Sex,” and Sexual Liminality

Both inside and outside prison walls, many *afeminados* used their charms and feminine personas in order to make a life and to play upon a certain captivation with the perverse that, despite its protestations of morality, permeated mainstream Mexican society. The fear that the third sex could ensnare unsuspecting individuals through deceit—and successful gender performances—was common. Yet, by publicizing *afeminados* activities and details about their lives, official sources helped disseminate information, however filtered, on what homosexuality was, how it could be recognized, and where it could be found. In this way, homosexuality was exotified, rather than simply denied status. And, through these texts, individuals were led to liminal

²⁰³ “Una riña de invertidos,” *El Nacional*, April 27, 1938, 9. Lugo was sent for treatment.

²⁰⁴ Amapola del Camino translates as “poppy of the pathway.”

²⁰⁵ “Riña de homosexuales en la cárcel del Carmen,” *El Nacional*, September 8, 1939, sec. 2, 1.

²⁰⁶ “Esos pederastas,” *El Nacional*, November 11, 1938, sec. 2, 3.

²⁰⁷ It is worth speculating if one reason the men were not already in Lecumberri or enduring longer sentences had something to do with their masculine appearance; more evidence, however, would be required to substantiate this.

spaces—which I define here as being on the threshold between two or more worlds, precisely what occurred the national, transnational, and homosexuality converged—such as those found in the Plaza Garibaldi. The irony was that the plaza, with its bars and mariachis, would become synonymous with *mexicanidad* itself, and it was also the *ambiente*’s “capital” for many men. Here I offer three examples of the interest in liminality as seen in cartoons and accounts of men being “duped” by *afeminados*; the market for books on the “third sex;” and the rise of the bar El Tenampa as a site that blended the perverse, the national, and the transnational simultaneously.

Don Chepe, Mr. Puff, Talismans, and the “Beautiful “Señoritas”

One of the anxieties about *afeminados* was the belief that “real men” could be duped into thinking they were women. That this preoccupation even existed points to the success these men had in their adoption of feminine styles and their talent for mimicking screen, studio, and stage starlets. For example, On at least two occasions, the *Detectives*’ weekly cartoon strip *Don Chepe y Mr. Puff, Notables Policías* by Oscar Urrutia—which chronicled the misadventures of Don Chepe, a rotund, mustachioed stereotype of a Mexican man and his side-kick Mr. Puff, a tall, severe-faced stereotype of an American man—dealt with this problem. For example, the September 19, 1932 strip showed the two men preparing for a night on the town. They then arrive in the Zócalo and flirt with two pretty señoritas—Lulú and Greta—leaving with them for some fun. An hour later, Mr. Puff comes running to Don Chepe—who is kissing the young woman on his lap and saying how he hoped they would never forget each other—warning him that its all a ruse and holding the other señorita’s wig. In the final panel, the two “señoritas” are unmasked as men, their clothing torn and their hairy legs revealed. Still, they express their interest: “Although you have hit me, *chaparrito lindo*,” says Greta, “I will continue loving you...adios sweetheart,” while Lulu exclaims “Look, ‘Greta,’ how cute (*que mono*), how divine

my little gringo looks!” as the men leave. In the second strip (May 15, 1933), the Chepe and Puff are invited to a party hosted by Gloria Swanson. Thrilled to hobnob with the cinema stars, they banter about their suitability for Swanson, both boasting they will be her favorite.²⁰⁸ However, when they arrive, they encounter a party full of *afeminados*, including “Swanson” himself. In both strips, Hollywood starlets figure prominently, showing a transnational component to the “duping.” “Greta” was a reference to actress Greta Garbo, while the reference to Swanson was obvious. “Lulu” may have been a reference to film star Louise Brooks, an actress who went by that nickname known for her beautiful looks and sexually liberated lifestyle.

“Duping” also occurred in real-life and even served as an excuse for participating in homosexual behaviors. In early June 1938, police received a call from Francisco Pulido, a seventeen year-old youth nicknamed “El Chiquito” (the little boy) who stated he had been deceived by three *afeminados*. Things started out pleasantly: the men had invited him to a residence located at number 10, calle de Ecuador where they got drunk together for several hours. However, at midnight, one of the *afeminados* revealed the party’s motive: the men were going “to marry” Pulido off to “Mimí Pinzón,” one of the *afeminados*. However, the youth rejected the premise and a few hours later police apprehended Mimí Pinzón and the others, including “Flor de Dalia” (Dalia Flower) who tried to flee upon seeing police.²⁰⁹

Another 1938 story described a more (witch)crafty attempt at duping a man. Authorities had brought various witches, charlatans, and *cartomancianas* (letter-mancers) to justice on the grounds that they exploited the ignorance of others, promising them help through “magic.” One individual seeking their help was an *afeminado* named Juan who lived in Matamoros,

²⁰⁸ Puff claims to have been her friend since childhood, while Don Chepe asserts that although he “is a little ugly,” his smile and flirtatious glances are irresistible.

²⁰⁹ “Aprehension de varios *afeminados*,” *El Nacional*, June 5, 1938, 3. Fleeing reinforced the constructed notion of *afeminados* incomplete men who would not or could not defend themselves.

Tamaulipas. Juan reported that all of the “amulets” and “witchcraft” he had paid for had failed to attract his idol Manuel. Thus, his letter implored the witch Julieta Judith to send him an “infallible talisman.”²¹⁰ Such examples show that at least some homosexual men viewed “straight” men as legitimate partners, and that they sought ways of making their interests legible to such men.

On the Nightstand

An interest in sexual difference—especially perverse difference—informed both the cartoon strips and the articles above. Similarly, larger published works would take up this theme. One of the more interesting was *El tercer sexo*, a Spanish translation of the French book *Le Troisième Sexe* by the infamous author Willy (pen name of Henri Gauthier-Villars).²¹¹ Originally published in 1927, the work was translated into Spanish at least by 1939, when an advertisement in the popular *Sucesos para Todos* magazine described a series of translated books published by Editorial Sayrols.²¹² The advert also offered other “novels of intense love” that were “exclusively for men” because their intensity was not “suitable for ladies,” including *Mafarka*, *El futurismo (Futurist Manifesto)*, and *Como se seducen a las mujeres y se traicionan a los hombres* by Filippo Marinetti; *Edad peligrosa* by J. Dantas; and four works by Omar Viñole. Despite the works’ intensity, the ad promised that “These are not pornographic works! These are not picaresque works, but instead their reading is recommendable!”²¹³ With such claims, the publisher hoped to garner both attention and mitigate charges that the texts were indecent. In *El tercer sexo*’s case, such concerns were justified, as it was a detailed chronicle of Parisian

²¹⁰ Federico Diaz Almeyda, “Procuraduría vs. charlatanismo,” *Jueves de Excelsior*, August 11, 1938.

²¹¹ Willy, *Le Troisième Sexe* (Paris-Édition, 1927). The book was finally, and beautifully, translated into English by the late Larry Schehr, a professor at the University of Illinois. See Willy, *The Third Sex*, trans. Lawrence R. Schehr (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

²¹² This was the same publisher of the famous *historieta Paquín* and *Sucesos para todos* itself.

²¹³ “Novelas de amor intenso,” *Sucesos para Todos*, May 9, 1939, 79.

homosexual culture.²¹⁴ The ad's implication was that the sort of "intense love" found in the work was of a type best hidden from others in a homophobic society, particularly women who might have objected to companions' interests in homosexuality in a city known for its licentiousness.²¹⁵

In another way, sexual "perversity" and difference interested homosexuals themselves.²¹⁶ Clues to what they were reading exist in the writings of Mexican authors like Novo, Nandino, and Juan Soriano. Novo read Freud, Edward Carpenter, and Havelock Ellis's works on sexuality in the early 1920s, the same time that he was exploring his homosexuality. Soriano read French poets like Rimbaud, Cocteau, and Verlaine. Gide was popular among the Contemporáneos, and if Guadalupe Marín's *La única* is believed, the presence of Gide's *Les fauxmonnayeurs* and Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* on her husband's nightstand was "proof" that he was gay.²¹⁷

Cultural studies scholar Rubén Gallo investigated Novo's engagement with the European works on sexology showed how Novo's annotations in Freud's complete works left invaluable insights into his responses to circulating theories. For example, in some cases Novo situated himself within the "neurotic modernity" and "psychopathological landscape" sketched by Freud, identifying himself as a "narcissist, an obsessional neurotic, or the victim of an inflated superego." In others, Novo camped it up, responding with a coy, mock-scandalized "oh!" to Freud's discussions of sexual perversities. The young writer also critiqued with wit and scholarly insight Freud's assertions on when sex-play began and the claim that there was anything "sad"

²¹⁴ Paris was a popular theme as a "fallen city" in reports from *Detectives* magazine in the 1930s. See for example, Marcel Montarrón, "Los afeminados de París," *Detectives*, March 27, 1933. My guess is that part of this stemmed from events like the Bataclan and also from the influence of French writing on the homosexual *intelligentia*.

²¹⁵ Nevertheless, publisher Sayrols clearly believed there was a market for such material.

²¹⁶ One of the most interesting—and difficult—problems facing the research of Mexican sexualities is establishing what publications or books were read by individuals of the *ambiente*, as well as what texts were in circulation between friends and lovers.

²¹⁷ Marín, *La única*, 19.

about homosexuality, retorting in German that there is “nothing sad about it!”²¹⁸

Slumming with “Los Rimbaucitos” at El Tenampa

The foreign, particularly French, influence on Mexican homosexuals involved in artistic and intellectual circles led many to go out in search of “authenticity” in working-class neighborhoods. Take Juan Soriano, an artist originally from Guadalajara, whose story illustrates the convergence of the *ambiente*, intellectuals, and working-class cultures in a sexually and socially liminal site. When Soriano arrived in 1935 at age 15, he soon joined the *ambiente*’s artistic circles. With his new friends, he mapped out his “kingdom”, an area a few blocks north of the Centro that included Órgano Street (known for prostitutes), Lazarin del Toro Street (where he ate delicious *panuchos* to cure his hangovers), and the El Tenampa bar.²¹⁹ This kingdom was a key contact zone; people of all classes mingled (although the area itself was primarily working-class), immigrants opened shops showing off wares and cuisines from Mexico’s regions, and the nightlife catered to bohemians, adventurers, tourists, and locals out for a night of “slumming.”²²⁰

Soriano and his friends at the time reveled in their exploits and tied them to what they read in Cocteau, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Verlaine, who were known as much for their libertine lifestyles and homoerotic experiences as they were for their striking writing. Rimbaud, who lived through times of poverty and wrote his poetry while still a teenager, especially appealed to

²¹⁸ Gallo, *Freud’s Mexico*, 16-20.

²¹⁹ Elena Poniatowska, *Juan Soriano, niño de mil años* (Barcelona: Plaza & Janés, Editores, 1998), 80. On prostitutes along Órgano Street, see Jiménez, *Lugares de gozo*, 204. *Panuchos* are a food from the Yucatán featuring a fried corn tortilla made by hand, in which meat, lettuce, tomato, onion, seasoned with bitter orange, salt, and *recado colorado*, a paste of pumpkin seeds, chile peppers, and achiote; the dish is garnished with avocado and carrot, and sometimes is accompanied with habanero pepper salsa.

²²⁰ So notorious was the area and lifestyles that it facilitated that Soriano’s sister Martha, who had invited him to the DF, chastised him and his friends as “degenerates” for their bohemian lifestyle in the seedy northern neighborhoods, where these pleasures of the palate and flesh combined with music imported from diverse Mexican states.

Soriano and his friends.²²¹ Thus, they set out to be “seers” in Rimbaud’s image, true poets forged through a “long, immense and reasoned derangement of the senses.” “I believed that I would encounter something exceptional in the slums,” he told his biographer Elena Poniatowska. Their capital was the bar El Tenampa, which “crowned actions and thoughts, El Tenampa was our delirium, El Tenampa, our Temple of Delphi.”²²² There the young men lived out their bohemian life, hobnobbed with the proletariat and debated existence with foreigners like Antonin Artaud.

What was it about the bar that made it worthy of being Soriano’s capital? On one level, it likely reminded him of his boyhood home in Jalisco, as El Tenampa was—and remains to be—famous for its mariachi music. El Tenampa served as a focal point for immigrants to the city to mingle with their comrades from their place of origin, as well as other immigrants from other areas and city residents from a variety of classes.²²³ El Tenampa also was a site of very obvious *ambiente*. During the 1920s, the bar became a favorite of the queer writers and artists who formed the Contemporáneos, as writer/doctor Elias Nandino recalled in his memoirs. The bar was among others sites—including the Salón México and Playa Azul—“where there was wine, singing, tarts, and opportunities.”²²⁴ Indeed, going to El Tenampa was “fashionable” because it was a site of opportunities, one in which the barriers between class, gender, and sexuality broke down, lubricated by the continuous music and liberal libations. Mariachis played song after song, commissioned by patrons. People celebrated together, did shots of tequila, or reminisced on lost loves over cups of pomegranate punch. People shouted and sang; others, as the night wore on,

²²¹ Like the French poet, Soriano had already experienced artistic success as a teen, having exhibited his paintings in Guadalajara.

²²² Poniatowska, *Juan Soriano*, 81.

²²³ The bar originated as a small store owned by immigrants Juan Indalecio Hernández and Amelia Díaz, who sought to offer cuisine like *pozole* and *birria* from their home in Cocula, Jalisco. By 1923, Cirlio Marmolejo, a pioneer in the development and dissemination of mariachi music who was also from Cocula, began playing at El Tenampa; by 1925, the business was expanded, and Marmolejo’s mariachis were made fixtures of the establishment, much to the delight of its numerous patrons.

²²⁴ Elías Nandino, *Juntando mis pasos* (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Aldus, 2000), 61.

cried in their solitude or spite. As Miko Viya recalled, “in the middle of this strange cacophony, one suffered or enjoyed himself.”²²⁵ Amorous displays were common, including between homosexuals. By morning, El Tenampa “exploded into a vortex of sexual options, with mariachis and alcoholic confessions at all volumes,” including between men.²²⁶

At first glance, it might seem surprising that a location like what would become the Plaza Garibaldi, on which El Tenampa still sits, would offer an allegory for understanding the constituencies, social spheres, and physical spaces in which homosexuals and mainstream Mexicans came into contact with each other in the post-revolutionary period. After all, the site is famed for is mariachis, that quintessential, if perhaps cliché, icon of *mexicanidad*, and while the men are dressed in fancy suits, one would not cast aspersions on their masculinity. Yet, mariachi started as a type of music and cultural practice that faced ridicule and prohibition in the capital, and it took a dedicated group of men and women to make it persist in the capital and to bring it more fully into the mainstream. Their persistence would turn *mariachis* into national icons, but in the meantime, the spaces they fashioned catered to those interested in existing in a zone of contact, a interstitial space of convergence and possibility.

In June 1939, *El Nacional* reported on an assault and injury of weekend *parrandero* Emeterio Rocha Mendoza in El Tenampa.²²⁷ Rocha Mendoza was wounded by mariachis in that “disgraceful center of vice”, a true *cantinucha*—i.e., disreputable cantina of “infamous standing”—that served as a site for drugs and as a “headquarters for *afeminados*.”²²⁸ It would be easy to stop at the association between the location, the patrons, and crime. Doing so, however,

²²⁵ Viya, *México Ayer*, 186.

²²⁶ Carlos Monsiváis, “Los gays en México: la fundación, la ampliación, la consolidación del gueto,” in *Que se abra esa puerta* (Mexico, D.F.: Paidós, 2010), 125.

²²⁷ *Irse de parranda* means “to go out for a wild night”, often with drinking or cantina hopping. A *parrandero* is thus someone who likes to party and is a music enthusiast, and he may be a fan or a musician himself.

²²⁸ “Lesionado en 'El Tenampa',” *El Nacional*, June 19, 1939, sec. 2, 2.

would miss the opportunity to see that the bar was no longer just a site in which to slum. El Tenampa had become a center of *ambiente*, in part spurred on, no doubt, by the dismantling of Cuauhtemotzín to the south. Soriano's capital, then, combined sexual possibility with overlapping uses of public and private space, and those cultural tropes that would become seen as universally Mexican would be born in this liminal space and receive patronage from alleged anti-Mexicans. And while Soriano would realize that this "capital" did not hold all that which he sought—and he would "abandon" it in favor of his own path—El Tenampa and other spaces like it would continue serving as metropolises of desire, identity formation, and transgression, queering the urban and national normative projects that sought to constrain them.²²⁹ As I argue in Chapter 7, the 1940s and 1950s would be the golden age of working-class *ambiente* in the capital.

Conclusion: Ugly Cults, Nation, and Homosexuality

Travel—between regions, in the city, across class-boundaries, to liminal spaces, abroad, and through cultures—helped to shape the *ambiente*'s inhabitants between 1920-1940, the styles they wore, the ideas they discussed, the personas they adopted. Theirs was a Mexico marked by grand debates on masculine citizenship, and a growing city with an increasingly visible *ambiente*. Theirs too was a nation riven with disagreements over "normal" sexuality and gender. These homosexual men engaged in and appropriated new identity forms as meaningful in terms of desire and aesthetics, whether in emulation of stars or as part of physical culture.

A final salvo, then, to link Chapters 3 and 4 together. A curious August 1939 column asserted that it was the time of the "cult of the ugly" and that "ugliness has come to occupy a preferential place among aesthetic values." This was logical because "effeminate" male dancers had "already gone out of fashion" and "the sterile preciousness has passed into history."

²²⁹ On Soriano rejecting his "capital," see Poniatowska, *Juan Soriano*, 83-84.

now men and women in the world in the world who want to live. Ridiculous homosexuality, cult of old aristocracies, has given way to the ugly man, strong and formal and the woman essentially feminine. The people have come to art with the sweat of centuries and healthy organs. The working-class is strong over the earth, in the *ejido* and workshop. And it is creating a new art impossible for scatterbrains to understand.²³⁰

These are strong words uttered on the eve of change as the goals and rhetoric of the Revolution became murkier in the 1940s and 1950s behind the apparatus of an increasingly institutionalized autocracy. What would remain, and intensify, was an idea of homosexuality as something foreign and threatening—particularly as it entered its mid-century “golden age”—eliciting a “homosexual panic” in the 1940s and 1950s (the subject of chapters 6 and 7).

However, this chapter has shown quite a different picture than found in the column’s tired tropes of the proletariat versus the aristocracy. The column was yet another attack in an ongoing culture war between those who sought to define *mexicanidad* in exclusive terms and those who embraced more expansive definitions. Instead of a culture of ugliness ruling over all, Mexico had been inundated with ideas of masculine beauty—the male body, after all, was worthy of viewing because it *was* beautiful, not ugly. Instead of homosexuals passing out of fashion, they became so visible as to warrant more concern by 1940 than they generated in 1920. Instead of being unable to understand the “new art,” homosexuals like those in the Contemporáneos rejected it as puerile and overly nationalistic and instead embraced transnational ideas of existence. Instead of sterility, homosexuals had help advance Mexican society, culture, and development, serving as advisors, educators, cultural producers, and even ambassadors abroad. In the streets, the *ambiente* flourished despite attempts to quash it. Men in the capital’s raucous cantinas and cabarets caught each other’s eyes and cruised in gyms, parks,

²³⁰ “Por no dejar: Lo feo,” *El Nacional*, August 23, 1939. More of the quote: “if they sing, they sing showing only the white of their eye, like the ancient sopranos, and even [start] warbling to the neurotic orchestra seats’ delight; if they declaim, they cross their eyes in a detestable Romantic fashion; if they paint, they sprinkle their paintings with sugar, if they write, they use and abuse honeyed adjectives; and if they were to fight, they were capable of fighting, they would use coats, buskins, and lances. But currently we are in the times of the ugly cannon...”

and cinemas. They resisted attempts to arrest them, to label them as weak, and to circumscribe their archipelagos of desire. So prominent was the homosexual “problem” that the “solution” was nothing less than relegation from urban centers to the Islas Marías penal colony, a process that formally linked homosexuals with other criminals as outside the body politic and made crimes against morality crimes against the nation. This is the subject of the following chapter.

Yet, it is more fitting to end not with the power exerted on homosexuals but with their own experiences. In February 1939, the capital held its Carnaval celebrations in el Bosque de Chapultepec, an huge park on the city’s southwest. “The forest was insufficient for containing the considerable quantity of happy *capitalinos* who for some hours forgot the quotidian preoccupations,” reported *El Nacional*. It was a grand party, a “Noche Mexicana,” (Mexican Night) with regional dances in floating scenes showcasing the “incomparable beauty of our women.” The forest’s lake was illuminated and music filled the air. There was a “battle” with flowers, a parade with allegorical floats, a queen and princesses, three balls, a multicolored pyrotechnic display, and entries from businesses to add significance to the event. It was, quite simply, the party of the decade. And among the happy citizens who partied until after midnight, were a group of *afeminados*; while *El Nacional* regarded them as the “ridiculous note” of the evening, they were still present despite police on hand and the roundups and stigma attached to them.²³¹ They too were part of the Noche Mexicana by their own unwillingness to be excluded. On that night, like many others, the mainstream world got a bit more salted.

²³¹ “Dieron fin las fiestas de Carnaval en esta metropoli,” *El Nacional*, February 22, 1939, sec. 1, 3.

Chapter 5: Inverts in the “Tomb of the Pacific:” The Islas Marías Penal Colony and Mexican Male Homosexuality, 1920s-1940s

Located some 60 miles off the coast of Nayarit State, the beautiful Islas Marías would seem an ideal spot for one of the tourist complexes for which Mexico is famous.¹ Among the chain of islands, María Madre, at 145 square kilometers, is the largest, and it is ringed with beaches.² Enjoying a tropical climate and seasonal rains, its lush plants and wildlife, both on land and in the ocean, make it in the words of some observers a “true tropical paradise.”³ Yet this “paradise” has been the home of a infamous penal colony since the early 1900s where even today Mexico houses some of its most notorious criminals. Who was sent there and why have changed over time, but during much of the twentieth century, homosexuals were some of the prime candidates for relegation to the penal colony from Mexican urban centers.

This is the story that “La Mariposa” (the Butterfly), a stylishly-dressed homosexual, told about himself one evening, while incarcerated at there in the 1930s:

One day they invited me to dance in the house of the fops (*rotos*),⁴ and I was dressed as a fairy⁵; the police discovered us and so in that suit they took me to the district and later here by direct trip; of course the fops were so...well... so like me, only with money, and that’s why they did nothing to them.⁶

La Mariposa told his story to Judith Martínez Ortega, then secretary for General Francisco

¹ Longitude 106° 30’ W and latitude 21° 35’ N.

² Two other islands located to the southeast—María Magdalena and María Cleofas—are sizeable, but were and continue to be uninhabited. The islands were named after three women named Mary in the New Testament: Mary, the mother of Jesus; Mary Magdalene; and Mary, the wife of Cleophas. Smaller islands and rocks are also present.

³ Eusebio Dávalos Hurtado, “El problema antropológico en las Islas Marías,” in *La colonia penal de las Islas Marías* (Mexico, D.F.: Ediciones Botas, 1970), 71-72. A number of endemic animals, such as the Tres Marías raccoon, make their home in the islands, as well as numerous birds, reptiles, and sea creatures. August and September are stormy, including hurricanes, and the local streams wax and wane seasonally due to the rains.

⁴ In Mexico, the term *roto*, as used by La Mariposa here, is synonymous with *petimetre*, which is a “fop” or “dandy”; the term also has the added significance of describing a licentious individual or libertine. Given La Mariposa’s description of being dressed the same as the other men, aside from their wealth, the translation of *roto* as “fop” makes the most sense.

⁵ La Mariposa uses “*vestida de mariposa*” here, literally “dressed like a butterfly” and bearing the significance of a homosexual.

⁶ Judith Martínez Ortega, *La Isla* (México: Ediciones Letras de México, 1938), 88.

Música, the colony's director from 1928-1933.⁷ La Mariposa found a sympathetic ear in Martínez Ortega who began to see homosexuals as victims of a gross injustice—*relegación*, that is relegation, to the penal colony.⁸ Police in 1920s and 1930s Mexico rounded up “suspects”—such as those they considered as likely thieves, vagabonds, and homosexuals—and sent them in *cuerdas* (chain-gangs) to the penal colony as a means of “cleaning up” the city.⁹ The authority to do this sort of roundup proved to be dubious at best; however, without judicial review, innocents and criminals alike were exiled. The press, in turn, reveled in the “sordid” details of homosexuals’ lives, stoked homophobic public sentiment, and glorified the police for their efforts in countering the unsavory “urban types” that threatened the capital’s social fabric, as well as the Mexican nation itself, with delinquency and crime.

Legally speaking, dancing with other men in a private residence was not a crime, as sodomy had been decriminalized in 1871 and same-sex interactions in private were legal as long as they did not offend “public morality”.¹⁰ His “crime” was being discovered by police—likely acting on a tip—which in the tortured logic of the Mexican penal code made it a “public” crime. Discovery was important because it invoked the legacy of the “Famous 41”, the infamous “birth” of Mexican homosexuality in which a group of men—some dressed in drag—were found dancing by police in November 1901 and were eventually relegated away from the capital into military service and penal camps in the nation’s periphery. La Mariposa faced a similar fate, first being rounded-up by police and then relegated without appeal to a distant penal colony. In

⁷ Música (1884-1954) was a prominent Mexican revolutionary and leftist politician, three-time governor of different Mexican states, friend of Lázaro Cárdenas, and enemy of Alvaro Obregón, who tried to have him assassinated. His influence on the Islas Marias penal colony was liberalizing; given his political disputes with other revolutionaries, it is likely that he was “exiled” there himself by Obregón’s allies in the Mexican government during the late 1920s until the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas in 1934. Such exile may have made him more tolerant of homosexuals and others wrongly exiled.

⁸ The word “relegación” evokes the sense of “confinement” or “isolation” befitting the colony’s isolation.

⁹ Literally a “line”.

¹⁰ See my discussion in chapter 1 of sodomy and of the 1871, 1929, and 1931 penal codes.

addition, like some of the *afeminados* arrested in 1901, La Mariposa's "betters" among the fops got off without punishment because they were wealthy, had sufficient social or political leverage, or could pay the necessary bribes to secure their freedom, even though the men were similar to him in style, mannerisms, and libertine sexual preferences. In other words, class-privilege could influence which men were relegated to the penal colony.

Homosexuals were a visible and sensational component of the *cuerdas* heading to the coast. The majority of journalists, criminologists, and novelists emphasized both the visibility and deviancy of these queer men, as well as their prominent numbers among the colony's population and their role in the colony's "sexual problem." This "problem"—which stemmed from the separation of men from suitable heterosexual women by virtue of incarceration and led them to turn, in the eyes of concerned reformers, to other men instead—was common in prisons. In the Islas Marias, it was even more pronounced, given the great distance from women in the city who might offer succor in conjugal visits and the extreme disparity between numbers of men and women at the colony. With few available women, men could be "depraved" in the search for sexual or emotional fulfillment, falling into the waiting embrace of the colony's *afeminados*.¹¹

In this way, the Islas Marias colony, while at times being an unforgiving and harsh place, nevertheless provided significant opportunities for homosexuals. Indeed, while the penal colony was intended as the solution for the "problem" of homosexuality in Mexican cities—by forcibly excising homosexuals from the urban physical spaces, politics, and culture through the process of relegation—it instead served as a critical site where homosexual identities and communities coalesced. In a sense, by trying to highlight the problem of the urban homosexual, authorities helped to create him through their attempts at negating the type. All this occurred in a space in

¹¹ Understandably, this vexed criminologists, who had organized the system of relegation and were responsible for putting such large numbers of men and homosexuals together in the same place.

which other Mexican groups—including criminals, communists, Catholics, and political dissidents—were crafting their own identities. The colony, designed as a social engineering project by an overweening interventionist state, was instead marked by a laxity of control over inmates’ spaces and experiences. This chapter thus explores the implications of this social engineering project for the debates on citizenship and nation, particularly as reflected through the “sexual problem” and the experiences that homosexuals had in forging identities and community at the colony, a site where they enjoyed greater openness to self-expression and freedom from hierarchies of violence than existed in other prisons due to the tacit tolerance—and at times support—of prison authorities and fellow inmates alike. The experiences that homosexuals would have would help instill a greater sense of self and a willingness to accept certain attributes of the homosexual “type”—such as that it even existed—while rejecting others, particularly the type’s association with criminality. This growing awareness would have dramatic impacts on homosexuals in the period and beyond, particularly as homosexuals began challenging their persecution more openly by mid-century.

In sum, this chapter focuses on what happened to homosexuals who were exiled from Mexico City through the process of *relegación* to the island penal colony of Islas Mariás. Understanding the penal colony is crucial to understanding homosexuality in Mexico City, as well as the nation, because the penal colony served as an extension of federal power and territory. Crimes committed in federal territory, like the capital, were thus anti-national crimes. The colony also was, in an important sense, a laboratory for Mexican ideas of criminology and citizenship, not simply a convenient depository for social undesirables. In this way, the fate of relegated Mexicans was inextricably linked to the actions taken in the capital and the surprising opportunities that the penal colony offered, particularly upon the reintegration of these

individuals into Mexican society. Some, like La Mariposa, were emboldened to claim the very citizenship that had been illegally denied to them, by virtue of disputing the grounds upon which their sexuality had been deemed criminal. Indeed, the unintended consequence of efforts at “rehabilitating” homosexuals through *relegación* served to reinforce what Mexican authorities had sought to eliminate: the homosexual community.

A note on sources: while the sources that describe the experiences of homosexuals are not from the condemned *afeminados* themselves, fragments of their voices remain, such as found in Martínez Ortega’s memoirs, as well as press reports, studies of the islands, and other texts described below. As this case study of the Islas Mariás will show, assumptions that any uniform view on homosexuality existed—i.e., that all non-homosexuals ridiculed them or that all homosexuals viewed themselves as somehow foreign to being “Mexican”—are belied by the variety of materials presented, even those from potentially hostile sources.

I. Patterns of Relegation and Legacies of the ‘41’

During the early 1900s, Mexican criminologists and social reformers sought new methods of fighting crime and delinquency, both of which were deemed as unfortunate side-effects of urbanization and as threats to national health. Youth reform and adult incarceration, as described in the previous chapters, were deployed as two means of countering these side effects. Yet, these “solutions”—reform schools, collective homes, and penitentiaries—only concentrated “undesirables” in close proximity to each other, and they served as “schools of vice” that propagated “anti-social” and “dangerous behaviors”.¹² Homosexuality was one such undesirable, threatening behavior, and for many reformers, was considered one of the gravest.

¹² See my discussion in chapters 2 and 3. For an excellent background on criminology in turn-of-the-century Mexico, see Robert M. Buffington, *Criminal and Citizen in Modern Mexico* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

Urban prisons and reform schools were problematic because they amplified the social conditions from which Mexican authorities believed delinquency to stem. Thus, reformers posited the rural countryside as a site of regeneration: by relegating delinquents away from the urban environments that degenerated them, they could be rehabilitated through masculine work. Socially beneficial behaviors could then be incubated that, upon a prisoner's return to liberty, would make them resistant to delinquency and useful citizens. By the time of the Revolution, given the prominence of the rural periphery to its legacy—such as through the “cooptation of Zapatismo into government in 1920 and its symbolic utilization as the quintessence of the Mexican Revolution under Cárdenas and his successors”—reformers viewed exile in “authentic”, rural Mexico as a means to bring wayward delinquents back into the national fold.¹³

During 1800s, reformers had discussed the necessity of building a penal colony away from the metropole. Sixty years of lobbying finally resulted in the acquisition of the colony site in 1905 by the Porfirian government. President Porfirio Díaz, on May 12, 1905, designated the three major islands of the Islas Marías—María Madre, María Magdalena and María Cleofas—as a penal colony.¹⁴ Within months of its designation, contractors began creating the infrastructure on the island María Madre, the only that would be populated. There, they founded a small port—Puerto Balleto—and numerous prison camps to ring the island.

The colony was meant to play a distinct role in the federal penal system; as Interior Minister and Vice President Ramón Corral directed, the colony was to serve as a site where “a practical method, both scientific and legitimate to end delinquency” in the capital could be

¹³ Claudio Lomnitz-Adler, *Exits From The Labyrinth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 56.

¹⁴ Juan de Dios Bojórquez, “*María Madre del archipiélago*”, *Islas Marías en el Océano Pacífico* (Mexico, D.F.: Talleres tipográficos de A. del Bosque, 1937), 48.

devised.¹⁵ That is, recidivists from the capital's jails could be sent to the colony, thereby alleviating overcrowding and diluting the jails' status as schools of vice. In addition, political prisoners threatening the regime could be remitted there.

Thus, on June 20, 1908, new legislation, established the "penalty of transportation to penal colonies" (*relegación*) like Islas Mariás for the punishment of "rateros, counterfeiters, vagrants and other 'habitual criminals'" who, through their actions, "constitute the veteran section of the army of crime, who commit the largest number of crimes...keep police constantly busy, and form the nucleus of the prison population." Prisoners could be sentenced to double sentences in the penal colony, thereby removing them from the city for a greater time than if they remained incarcerated normally.¹⁶

Prior to the colony's founding, *relegación* typically involved either being sent to forced-labor camps in the nation's periphery or military conscription.¹⁷ For example, delinquents were exiled to the Yucatán during the ongoing military campaign against the Maya peoples in the Caste Wars¹⁸. According to news reports, at least twelve of the members of the ill-fated ball in 1901 were conscripted into the 24th Army Battalion and faced service in the Yucatán.¹⁹

¹⁵ Buffington, *Criminal and Citizen*, 98.

¹⁶ Pablo Piccato, *City of Suspects: Crime in Mexico City, 1900-1931* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 168. Both Querido Moheno, a political journalist and Porfirian national deputy, and criminologist Miguel Macedo influenced the law. Mexican criminologists may have been influenced by historical precedent, such use of convicts as frontier colonists in the Iberian empires, as well as British Empire. Brazil had an island penal colony off the coast of Pernambuco by the 1830s. See Peter M. Beattie, *The Tribute of Blood: Army, Honor, Race, and Nation in Brazil, 1864-1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 143. In addition, influence may have come from the creation of similar relegation laws elsewhere, such as the Relegation Law of 1885 passed in France that established the New Caledonia island penal colony. See Stephen A. Toth, "Colonisation or Incarceration? The Changing Role of the French Penal Colony in Fin-de-Siècle New Caledonia", *The Journal of Pacific History* 34, no. 1 (June 1999), 59-74. In addition, penal colonization debates were ongoing in several European nations in the early 1900s. For background and a critical contemporary perspective, see Robert Heindl, "Penal Settlement and Colonization," trans. Bertha Wolf, *Journal of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology* 13, no. 1 (May 1922): 56-60.

¹⁷ Piccato, *City of Suspects*, 168.

¹⁸ 1847-1901, with smaller-scale hostilities continuing until 1933.

¹⁹ "El baile de solo hombres," *El País*, November 23, 1901, 1. How long the men actually served—or if they truly did so at all—remains unclear; however, they may have faced up to several years of labor, given both the penalties for moral outrages, as well as the laws against sodomy still extant in Yucatán itself.

Similarly, when police disrupted another event in October 1913 in which homosexuals “reproduced the memorable *soirée* of the 41” in their “dance of men dressed as women”—an event that shows homosexual resistance, despite the risks—the captured men were then consigned to military service during one of the bloodiest times of the Revolution.²⁰

However, during later stages of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) and thereafter, many prisoners were sent to Islas Mariás, located approximately sixty miles off the coast of Nayarit state in the Pacific Ocean. Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary governments would continue to use the colony, despite its Porfirian associations; for example, *El Pueblo* reported on a group of *afeminados* that arrived in Manzanillo in January 1917.²¹ Two months later, authorities in Guadalajara surprised a party of *afeminados*; these too were to be sent to the colony.²² And in September 1925, *El Demócrata* in the capital reported on scheduled roundups to relegate dangerous *afeminados* from there.²³ *Cuerdas* to the coast would become commonplace by the 1930s and routinely reported on by the press.²⁴

Anatomy of Relegación

Even with the new law, the legal grounds for the deportation of homosexuals from the capital to another location remained dubious since private sodomy was no longer a crime after 1871.²⁵

Instead, “moral outrages” (*ultrajes a la moral*) against the public were criminalized. this was a

²⁰ “Un baile de hombres vestidos de mujer,” *El Diario*, October 10, 1913, 7. See also “Consignado a las armas,” *El País*, October 10, 1913, pg 7. Given the timing of their arrest, these men likely served for Victoriano Huerta’s federal army.

²¹ “Fueron silbados los afeminados,” *El Pueblo*, February 3, 1917.

²² “Afeminados aprehendidos,” *El Pueblo*, March 17, 1917.

²³ “Va a hacerse una razzia de sujetos de conducta dudosa para enviarlos a las Islas Mariás,” *El Demócrata*, September 14, 1925.

²⁴ It does not appear that the term *cuerda* was used to describe chain-gangs until the post-revolutionary period in the 1920s; by the 1930s, the term was used frequently in the press.

²⁵ This was due to the influence of European penal codes on Mexican criminologists and medical jurists. See the arguments raised in chapter 1.

slippery category of crime that was not uniformly prosecuted nor penalized by judges and could be difficult to prove, as what constituted an “outrage” was in the eye of the beholder. Police and some social reformers turned to the use of extra-legal roundups by police that did not require judicial review and that were supported in the press, justifying their raids with protecting the health and morality of the urban centers. The continuation of extra-legal roundups targeting queer men, among others, suggests they were viewed and accepted as a shadowy component of the judicial and penal systems, although by 1934, then president Lázaro Cárdenas would call for an inquiry into the cases of those relegated without due-process.²⁶

Police followed a pattern when relegating homosexuals and other criminals to the Islas Marías. First, individual “crimes” were associated with collective criminality, and police relied on discourses found in criminological texts and editorials influenced by Italian writers like Lombroso and Pende to assert that homosexuals comprised a definable, criminal group, in the same way that “thieves” or other delinquents were.²⁷ Historian Pablo Piccato has argued that “to systematically eradicate thieves, turn-of-the-century Mexican criminologists had to construct them as a collectivity,” i.e., a “clearly defined social group, identifiable by its criminal skills and its presence in certain spaces of the city.”²⁸ Individuals were thus linked to criminal groups and targeted for their “abnormal” hereditary, cultural, social, spatial, and racial characteristics that were deemed abnormal by medical jurists, criminologists, the press, and social reformers.²⁹

²⁶ Piccato, *City of Suspects*, 174. The absence of Lecumberri prison files for the majority of the men arrested in roundups suggests that either they were let go, did a short amount of time in the Carmen prison, were processed under some other crime, or ended up in *cuerdas* without seeing an actual trial, as was the case with La Mariposa.

²⁷ Lombroso’s theories of criminal types would resonate with Mexican criminologists and medical jurists for generations. See for example Carlos Roumagnac, *Los criminales en México: Ensayo de psicología criminal* (México: El Fénix, 1904); Gustavo Rodríguez, *Apuntes de medicina legal* (Mexico: Ediciones Botas, 1938); “Las Islas Marías,” *Detective*, June 20, 1932.

²⁸ Piccato, *City of Suspects*, 164.

²⁹ This system was also used to define other delinquent groups, ranging from vagabonds and epileptics to drug addicts and homosexuals.

As a collectivity, *afeminados* could be found throughout Mexico City, but they had their favorite haunts, such as the Alameda Park, Madero Avenue, and a number of bars, cantinas, cabarets, and private homes in the city's center.³⁰ The most visible homosexuals in these locations—by virtue of their speech patterns, behaviors, and fashion styles—became the targets and scapegoats of moralization campaigns. As these effeminate homosexuals were rounded up, had their pictures or caricatures splashed in the press, and were paraded in front of a jeering public on their way to relegation, they also became equated with homosexuality itself and presented as emblems of how male homosexuality was believed to appear.³¹ Publicity thus reinforced ideas of homosexuals as a definable “urban type”.

Once criminals were rounded up and defined as a dangerous collectivity, authorities needed a solution that avoided both the troublesome “schools of vice” and judicial review. Enter the “administrative exercise:” in 1923 police, without court supervision, were able “to detain suspected *rateros* for fifteen days” and judge, based on the accused individual's personal data and criminal antecedents, whether or not he or she should be relegated to the Islas Marías colony.³² Even when prisoners challenged *relegación*'s legality—to the extent that judges granted appeals or suspended *cuerdas*—police forcibly relegated prisoners to the colony.³³

Important legacies stem from this exercise. First, relegation helped define collectivities

³⁰ See Chapters 2 and 4 on these sites of socialization.

³¹ José Guadalupe Posada, the famous Mexican engraver, had produced broadsheets for the Famous 41 scandal that enshrined effeminate men as homosexuals and homosexuals as effeminate men. Posada's broadsides of the event have been republished numerous times; see, for example, Edward Larocque Tinker, *Corridos & Calaveras* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961), 9-10. Prominent Mexican photographers like Agustín Casasola and Enrique Díaz, in their effort to document Mexican society in all its aspects, advanced such images in the early decades of the 1900s as well, as did newspapers like *Excelsior* and magazines like *Detectives*. I describe these images in several chapters; those by Casasola and Díaz can also be found at the Archivo Casasola (Fototeca Nacional) in Pachuca and the Fototeca of the Archivo Nacional in Mexico City, respectively.

³² *Ibid.*, 171, 173.

³³ Pablo Piccato, “Cuidado con los Rateros: The Making of Criminals in Modern Mexico City,” in *Crime and Punishment in Latin America: Law and Society Since Late Colonial Times*, ed. Ricardo D. Salvatore, Carlos A. Aguirre, and Gilbert M. Joseph (Durham: Duke, 2001), 250. This is a clear indication of the weakness of the judiciary and the power of the police to enact their own agenda.

and those that were relegated *as* criminal. Second, police, by arbitrarily detaining “known criminals”, enshrined “the belief that [they could] identify and act against criminals without the burden of respect for individual rights” on the basis of their own prejudices and without rebuke.³⁴ Innocents—whose “crime” may not have survived court challenges—were exiled along with hardened criminals.³⁵

For Carlos Monsiváis, this process of identifying homosexuals as a definable group worthy of extra-legal excision from society was marked by “the absolute negation of the human and civil rights of the homosexuals.” Citing the Famous 41 scandal, he noted that

From that moment on, ‘jurisprudence is felt’ and the repressions are legal, not because they correspond to some text, but rather, because they have already once been so. And this promotes incessant *redadas* (roundups), police blackmails, tortures, beatings, and detention in prisons and in the penal colony of las Islas Marías, all without motive. And society, or those who are aware, finds these proceedings normal and admirable.³⁶

In this way, the process of defining homosexuals as a group was intimately linked to the processes by which they were denied citizenship, marked as anti-Mexican, and suffered societal abuse. The 41 scandal thus enabled later “administrative exercises” to occur, because it became accepted that *afeminados* were not Mexican and not deserving of their rights. Afterwards, innocents—whose “crime” may not have survived court challenges or would have been punished less severely—ended up relegated along with numerous hardened criminals.³⁷ The social profiling conducted during the 1923 exercise would continue throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

To be fair, some reformers saw relegation as a compassionate solution to homosexual “delinquency” that benefitted both society and the homosexuals. Indeed, relegation was believed

³⁴ Piccato, *City of Suspects*, 175.

³⁵ Certainly some of those rounded up as criminals may have simply been in the wrong place at the wrong time.

³⁶ Carlos Monsiváis, “The 41 and the Gran Redada,” in *The Famous 41: Sexuality and Social Control in Mexico, 1901*, ed. Robert McKee Irwin, Edward J. McCaughan, and Michelle Rocio Nasser (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 164.

³⁷ Certainly some of those rounded up as criminals may have simply been in the wrong place at the wrong time.

to be one “treatment” for homosexuality as expressed in its two major forms: “congenital” homosexuals, i.e., those born as sexually deviant, and “perverted” homosexuals who were sexually deviant due to the social environment. For example, Professor Manuel Velazquez Andrade, director of the Casa de Orientación para Varones, wrote in 1932 that the countryside was one of only two possible solutions—the other being internment in mental hospitals or prison wards—for the problem of congenital homosexuality among juvenile delinquents.³⁸ Away from the urban settings that exacerbated their illness in a remote rural colony, “the sick c[ould] lead a simple life of work.”³⁹ For other reformers, work offered the chance to convert *afeminados* into “real men” through “masculine” labors. Men could be exposed to a rural, “virile” environment in which the “toughness of proletarian generations” could be effectively reintegrated into the *hombrecitos* and *fifis*, who through capitalist exploitation had developed effeminate characteristics.⁴⁰ In other words, the “anti-social” character of homosexuals could be “cured” by instilling in them the masculine virtues of the Revolution and offering them a means of participating in the proletarian struggle.⁴¹ In both cases, relegation allowed for the segregation of respectable, healthy Mexican society from contagious homosexuals and other criminals who threatened youth and the nation, just as its architects had intended.⁴²

³⁸ This was one of the major reform schools in the capital, and Velazquez based his observations on his interactions and study of the young men and boys under his care.

³⁹ Manuel Velazquez Andrade, *La delincuencia juvenil* (Mexico: Editorial "Cultura", 1932), 74.

⁴⁰ *Fifis* and *hombrecitos* were mocking terms applied to dandified men. Quotes from “La escuela al aire libre y sus magnificos resultados en el campo de la educación,” *El Nacional*, November 20, 1932. This article was part of a commemorative edition for that date. The shift towards open-air work as part of penal rehabilitation was ongoing in several nations in the early twentieth-century. For a contemporary perspective, see Heindl, “Penal Settlement and Colonization.” Heindl cites the desire to put men to work cultivating land and give them a more human sentence away from the “gloomy prison cell”, as well as the eventual colonization of convicts on the land they made arable. He also cites the challenges that penal colonies faced.

⁴¹ See chapters 2 and 3 on the anti-social nature of homosexuality, as discussed by criminologists and medical jurists, among others.

⁴² See Buffington, *Criminal and Citizen*, 98-99.

Justifying Relegation: Roundups and the Press

In addition to the “formal” process of relegation, a corollary process of legitimating the extra-legal process occurred in the press.⁴³ For example, in July 1930, at 25 Calle Roldán, police captured a group of *afeminados* who were alleged accomplices to bands of Mexico City thieves. Citizens turned out to see the spectacle, reported *El Nacional*:

The parade of these *afeminados* yesterday through various of the capital's streets provoked public hilarity and there was no lack of people who insulted them upon seeing them with their clothing and shameless womanly manners in their journey to police central.⁴⁴

Through such stories, the press amplified the cultural mindset promoting the expulsion of homosexuals by making the public witnesses to homosexual delinquency.

Like the police, the press followed a number of steps to justify roundups. First, they helped make the “crimes” public by publicizing their discovery. Included in the publicity was often some form of public humiliation, such as *afeminados* dragged past onlookers on their way to the police stations. Second, the press blended moral condemnation with snippets of legal theory while ironically—and perversely—reveling in the sordid details of queer lives.⁴⁵ Third, they extolled the police’s vigilante virtues and initiative in “solving” urban problems themselves. Overall, the process of relegation offered golden opportunities for journalists; even the nickname of the islands—the “Tomb of the Pacific”—was dramatic.⁴⁶

With every roundup, journalists and editorialists gleefully speculated—and expected—

⁴³ As noted in Chapters 2 and 3, the press often employed perspectives influenced by criminological theories.

⁴⁴ “A las Islas Marias iban los invertidos,” *El Nacional*, July 29, 1930, sec. 2, 1. This party was located on the east side of the Centro, several blocks east of the Zócalo and a some blocks northwest of the Merced market.

⁴⁵ The police also had a prime public opportunity to show off their crime-fighting prowess and to “wag-the-dog” away from their own increasing corruption, by foisting public energies and passions onto a sector of society that few would defend and many would ridicule.

⁴⁶ Miguel Gil, *La tumba del Pacífico*, vol. 1, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Mexico: Ediciones de “La Prensa”, 1931). Journalist Gil used the phrase as the title of his travelogue and adventures to the Islas, which received glowing reviews from readers.

that *afeminados* were destined for the Pacific colony. Indeed, many were. A photo of a *cuerda*, appearing in the August 3, 1929 edition of *El Nacional* carried this caption:

Yesterday another *cuerda* of 130 individuals departed bound for the Islas Marias, who have been processed for diverse crimes, predominant among those drug addicts, thieves, and *afeminados*. A federal escort will accompany them until the port of Manzanillo, where they will wait for the ship that will conduct them to the Colony of confinement.⁴⁷

Rival *Excelsior*, for its part, ran photos of the *cuerda*, as well as five homosexuals, who “posed before the photographic cameras adopting postures like ballerinas”⁴⁸ and who were using “feminine sweaters, short sleeves, and rouge.” *El Universal* described six *afeminados* wearing bracelets and necklaces that shone.⁴⁹ These descriptions reinforced the homosexual type that authorities sought delineate as criminal and noteworthy.

The following spring, police arrested four more homosexuals near the statue of Beethoven, a popular meeting site for homosexuals in the Alameda Park. *El Nacional* urged that the four men be sent to Islas Marias without delay.⁵⁰ The newspaper expressed a similar desire in October 1932, when it mockingly documented another roundup of *afeminados* in the Alameda, reporting that “as a consequence of this strictly moral act, yesterday the jails of the Jefatura de Policía were full of these lamentable and odious types, and one could see the invertos [*invertidos*] cry, with their makeup and powder smeared on their cheeks.”⁵¹ The author concluded that the men—described as wealthy and socially “cream of the crop”—would be sent by metropolitan police chief Guillermo Palma to the islands.⁵²

⁴⁷ “Otra cuerda para las Islas Marias,” *El Nacional*, August 3, 1929, sec. II, 1.

⁴⁸ “Ciento treinta y tres rateros, afeminados, y vendedores de drogas,” *Excelsior*, August 3, 1929, sec. 2, 1; “Grupo de afeminados,” *Excelsior*, August 3, 1929, sec. 1, 9. *Excelsior* claimed that 133 individuals were in the group bound for the colony.

⁴⁹ “Criminales de nota para las Islas Marias,” *El Universal*, August 3, 1929, sec. 2, 1.

⁵⁰ “Afeminados,” *El Nacional*, March 24, 1930, sec. 1, 8.

⁵¹ “Afeminados presos ayer en la Alameda,” *El Nacional*, October 13, 1932, sec. 1, 4.

⁵² Of course, they, like the earlier mentioned fops in La Mariposa’s story, may have only suffered the humiliation, rather than the full reality of *relegación*, due to their wealth.

By March 1934, a new campaign was underway “to clean up the capital of thugs.” Two major roundups occurred within two weeks. The first on March 8 netted forty-four “notoriously dangerous individuals” including drug addicts, swindlers, con-men, pimps...pickpockets, and *afeminados*.⁵³ Two weeks later, the other raid began, netting 18 “degenerates” and “inverts.” The raid had surprised an “animated dance” of *afeminados* who were “dedicated to dancing around a phonograph.” Many of the men, in addition to their feminine dress, had “painted faces imitating women.”⁵⁴ “La Magañita”, a “matchmaker of his species,” hosted the party, and authors in both *El Nacional* and *Excelsior* surmised that he, along with other party-goers, would be sent on to Islas Mariás.⁵⁵ The roundup was to continue as part of the larger campaign for days

due to the unedifying spectacles which these individuals give many times in public places. Some of these individuals would pass through the streets and through centers of vice, especially in the hours at dawn, dressed as women.⁵⁶

Three years later in August 1937, police surprised a similar party involving a “true orgy” of fifteen *afeminados* “dressed in women’s clothing.” Again, the men were sent to the Pacific.⁵⁷

In each of these examples, cross-dressing homosexuals, as the most visible queer type due to their adoption of feminine styles, were the raids’ primary targets; they were also marked by the press as *the* homosexual type, and even, a “species”. As with La Mariposa’s case, the “crime” that the *afeminados* committed was not sex; instead, police and the press criminalized their campy, stereotypically “feminine” behaviors—such as makeup and affected voices—as *ultrajes a la moral*.⁵⁸ This justified the roundups, and homosexuals could expect little press sympathy, which acted like a proxy jury to convict the men in the court of public opinion. In

⁵³ “Razzia de 44 delincuentes,” *El Nacional*, March 8, 1934, sec. 2, 1.

⁵⁴ “En animado baile son sorprendidos unos afeminados,” *Excelsior*, March 23, 1934, sec. 2, 1.

⁵⁵ Homosexuals as matchmakers or astrologers were common during this period, if not always openly.

⁵⁶ “Una redada de ‘invertidos,’” *El Nacional*, March 23, 1934, sec. 2, 1, 3.

⁵⁷ “Detenidos,” *El Nacional*, August 27, 1937, 6.

⁵⁸ See Chapter 1 for definitions of the crime.

sum, while many of the homosexual gatherings had been clandestine and only discovered by accident, they were still prosecuted as public crimes, even as the “outraged public” was generally hypothetical, rather than real. The press’s role, then was to effect and then affect an outraged public through its articles, thereby helping to enable the criminalization of homosexual behaviors, even as the same-sex sexuality itself was legal.

Cuerdas, Class, and Notorious Criminals

*“Adiós, mis padres queridos, ya nos van a desterrar, adios, todos mis amigos, les puede ustedes pasar...” (Goodbye, my beloved parents, already they’re going to banish us, goodbye, all my friends, the same can happen to you...) ”*⁵⁹ from the corrido “De la Cuerda a las Islas Marías”

On the bright side, while an ominous sign, being caught in a *razzia* was not necessarily a guarantee of being sent to the Islas Marías, despite journalists’ clamor and police enthusiasm. By the 1930s, individuals rounded up by the police were sometimes first incarcerated in another jail for observation (such as the Carmen jail). While in prison, men could be studied from days to months, with the number and quality of their crimes weighed to see if they merited exile.⁶⁰ Some used this time to make an appeal. As Piccato noted, “Many convicts appealed their sentences, regardless of the probable outcome, because they knew that the appeal would take several months, thus entitling them to remain in Mexico City for the rest of their sentences.” Some even turned to violence, attacking “their victims, policemen, or fellow inmates” so that new charges for the assault would be brought against them.⁶¹ Such actions occurred because prisoners feared exile, as the *corrido* cited above shows, because staying in the city offered the hope of reintegration into society and social connections to mainstream society. In contrast, for the

⁵⁹ Antonio Avitia Hernández, *Corridos de la capital* (Mexico: Conaculta, 2000), 216. The first reference to this *corrido* I have found is from Vincente Mendoza, *El romance español y el corrido mexicano, estudio comparativo*, (México: UNAM, 1939), 374. This means the *corrido* was in circulation during the first third of the 20th century.

⁶⁰ Manuel Múzquiz Blanco, “Una “cuerda” de presos a las Islas Marías,” *Detective*, November 30, 1931, 4, 13.

⁶¹ Piccato, *City of Suspects*, 204. It is unclear if homosexuals took drastic measures to avoid relegation. Many homosexuals like La Mariposa lacked even the right to make a judicial appeal.

average prisoner, the islands promised “the unknown, the sea, tough work, the horror of the gruesome stories of those who have gone and returned, and above all, the final separation from all affection, from all praise.”⁶² Not all of these challenges succeeded, and for queer men, their perceived sex/gender deviance would prove an aggravating factor that justified exile.

As for those homosexuals who were relegated, most were chosen for their “notoriety” and the perceived threat of their sex/gender deviance. While many of the press’s targets were debauched elites—in keeping with revolutionary rhetoric—these poor homosexuals were those most at the mercy of the arbitrary methods, as they were notorious, “known criminals” due to their abnormal sex/gender appearances, “prone” to recidivism, and were unable to hire lawyers for their defense. They formed the *cuerdas* with other unfortunates, while an “infinity of shoplifters, truly dangerous thieves, drug dealers, [and] recidivists having [spent] fifteen or twenty times in the Penitentiary” never were relegated to the “tomb of the Pacific.”⁶³ Homosexuals were considered, in other words, among the worst “criminals”, since they were relegated instead of more deserving others. We can surmise that some—like their heterosexual counterparts—may have indeed preferred to stay in prison, due to the proximity to the city, friends, family, and lovers. Moreover, as shown in the previous chapter, many incarcerated *afeminados* had carved out for themselves a meaningful life within the confines of the federal prison; they may not have wanted to leave such a situation.⁶⁴ Unfortunately, many lacked the “two or three pesos to buy their miserable freedom.”⁶⁵ Thus, while homosexuality was known to

⁶² Múzquiz Blanco, “Una “cuerda” de presos a las Islas Marías,” 4, 13. Múzquiz was Secretary of Lecumberri prison in 1930.

⁶³ Martínez Ortega, *La Isla*, 42.

⁶⁴ See my discussion of the “neutros” in Lecumberri in Chapter 4.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 41. Bribes were another legacy of the Famous 41—rumor in Mexico has long suggested that instead of 41, there were actually 42, with the forty-second man being Don Ignacio de la Torre, then president Porfirio Díaz’s son-in-law. See Carlos Monsiváis, “The 41 and the Gran Redada,” in *The Famous 41: Sexuality and Social Control in Mexico, 1901*, ed. Robert McKee Irwin, Edward J. McCaughan, and Michelle Rocio Nasser (New York: Palgrave

exist across all social strata, “infecting” everyone from rich playboys to the common waiter, poorer and more “notorious” homosexuals faced the brunt of relegation.⁶⁶

On Trains and Transportation

“Adiós mi México hermoso, adiós, bella Capital, me llevan por peligroso a esa Colonia Penal...” (“Goodbye my beautiful Mexico, goodbye, beautiful Capital, they take me as dangerous to this Penal Colony...”)—from the *corrido* “De la Cuerda a las Islas Mariás”⁶⁷

Imagine the scene: the steam and shrill trills of the train whistles, the bustle of police hauling struggling, weeping, and shouting men onto the train, onlookers calling out slurs—“¡Maricón! ¡Invertido!”—while their children cheered and savored the street food hawked at a nearby stand. Paperboys dodging to and fro, handing out newspapers describing the sordid story of the day, illustrated with engravings or photographs, like programs at a sporting event or performance. José Guadalupe Posada captured one such event in his engraving detailing the train trip to the Yucatán endured by the relegated “*maricazos*”⁶⁸ of the famous 41.⁶⁹ Many a Mexican homosexual faced this experience as part of being expelled from the capital.

On the day of the *cuerda*, an “atmosphere of seriousness and sadness” pervaded Lecumberri prison. Prisoners crowded against bars of the *crujias*—cell blocks—and “tragic masks appeared” on their faces, “some carved in granite with a gesture of despair on contracted lips for the agonized wail or sob,” with others wracked by “strange gestures that reflect the

Macmillan, 2003), 148. Police were and still are paid poorly in Mexico, so the *mordida*, i.e. the “bite,” is used to supplement their income and without such bribes, difficulties can occur.

⁶⁶ On homosexuals in various classes, see Jaime Luna, “Los homosexuales y las tribadas,” *Detectives*, October 25, 1937, 29-30.

⁶⁷ Avitia Hernández, *Corridos*, 216.

⁶⁸ Big “maricón”, i.e., “big fags”.

⁶⁹ The original broadsheet was published by A. Vanegas Arroyo in 1901 and has been reprinted since. In the image, a train forms the background, its smoke trailing across the page. Soldiers and police, standing at attention, watch the crowd. In the center, the accused face the train, surrounded by others hiding their faces. Interestingly, given that he was a champion of the working-classes, Posada’s engravings illustrating the process portray elite victims, rather than the lower classes who were often victims of the roundups, yet the men conscripted were more likely from the lower classes, rather than elites who paid bribes or used political influence, such as de la Torre, to remain free.

spiritual torment that agitates within the dark underworld of the soul.”⁷⁰ The prisoners’ anguish mirrored that of the groups of people who appeared at the gates, waiting to see their loved ones for what they may have believed would be the last time. For middle-class reformer Manuel Múzquiz Blanco, these families and friends had “a false notion” that the colony was an “inferno” from which they would not return, even as others had already returned from previous sentences in the colony. Múzquiz, naturally, was not part of the *cuerdas*.⁷¹ He also unsympathetically described the relatives and friends of those to be sent to the coast in the *cuerda*, noting that

They are ragged women and skinny children, old women supported by gnarled canes, criminal types in whose faces *pulque* and the switchblade have left indelible marks. Breaking from time to time the gray of this sad group [is] the dress of some slut from the whorish neighborhoods of Cuauhtemotzín or Rayón.⁷²

With these words, Múzquiz Blanco showed his own disdain for the lower-class individuals, as well as the social conditions in which they lived, which, from his middle-class perspective, had created the delinquency.

Many *cuerdas* began early in the morning, and prisoners were loaded into rail cars;⁷³ other cars carried supplies and the military escort. The rail journeys exacted a toll on the condemned prisoners, both physically and mentally. An example from a 1901 *corrido*, printed with Posada’s broadsheet engraving, detailed the trip that the Famous 41, and most likely other homosexual prisoners, took:

Without considering much
our most chaste sex,
nor the interesting state
in which we all kept ourselves

⁷⁰ Múzquiz wrote the piece in 1930, and portions of it were published in *Detective* in 1931.

⁷¹ He also had a flair for the dramatic in his writing where he would talk about the islands in just the manner in which the crowd he derided as ignorant feared.

⁷² Manuel Múzquiz Blanco, “Una cuerda a las Islas Marías,” in *La colonia penal de las Islas Marías: su historia, organización, y régimen* (Mexico, D.F.: Ediciones Botas, 1970), 118. *Pulque* is a fermented beverage.

⁷³ It’s not clear if they were in proper passenger cars or cargo cars, but the latter is likely, given that they were crammed together in the cars.

They packed all of us
like horrible mincemeat
in some shitty third-class car
of the giant Mexican train.

Jumbled together like *chilaquiles*⁷⁴
we traveled with soldiers
who leprously injured
our modesty without shame

Poor little Sofio
had many fainting spells
with the constant shakes
of that very wicked train.⁷⁵

The *maricones*, who served as the *corrido*'s narrators and used feminine-gender markers, were herded together, taunted and ridiculed. For some, like poor Sofio, the trip was likely filled with sexual abuse at the hands of their "escort" of soldiers."⁷⁶

Other trains carried men (and a few women) from Mexico City to the Pacific coast, where they would embark on ships for the prison camps at Islas Marias. This process was known as *hacer un viaje*, or "taking a trip", in the criminal slang of the time.⁷⁷ Such trips were hardly as pleasant as the term might imply. A *cristera*⁷⁸ in 1929 remarked that during her journey, "the first day of our trip they gave us a piece of bread with already decomposed meat and beans that

⁷⁴ A delicious, traditional Mexican dish of fried pieces of tortillas, salsa or mole, cheese, cream, and sometimes shredded meat and refried beans. The point of the word here is that it is a dish in which everything is shredded up and mixed together, just as they were on the train.

⁷⁵ Posada, "41 maricones para Yucatán", Broadsheet, A. Vanegas Arroyo, 1901. Translation is mine.

⁷⁶ Ben. Sifuentes-Jáuregui, *Transvestism, Masculinity, and Latin America Literature: Genders Share Flesh*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 37. Sifuentes-Jáuregui notes in his reading of the *corrido* that the "constant shakes" (*continuos meneos*) could be read both as "the train's movements or penetration. Even if the *corrido*, like some of the articles published about the scandal itself, is of unclear origin and is likely filtered sensationally through Posada and those around, it nevertheless is a useful archive. In other words, despite Robert McKee Irwin's skepticism that the articles and *corrido* were genuine, there is very likely some accuracy to the *corrido*'s account, even if embellished by imaginative *corrido* writer. This is because it is well-documented that homosexuals were abused in prison settings by both the other prisoners and the guards. Thus, the tongue-in-cheek of the *corrido* was likely more than just humor, and those "in-the-know" might have taken perverse pleasure at the abuse showered on the "ladies" and their "chaste sex."

⁷⁷ José Raúl Aguilar, *Los métodos criminales en México: cómo defendernos* (Mexico, D.F.: Ediciones Lux, 1941), 203. Aguilar provides a detailed list of *caló*, or criminal slang, for the first decades of the 1900s.

⁷⁸ A member of the Catholics who rebelled against the secular Revolutionary government in the 1920s.

we could not eat; the second day they gave us nothing.”⁷⁹ Even the “sock water” (*agua del calcetín*),⁸⁰ or what passed for coffee in the penitentiary, was better.

Just as when they lined the streets to watch homosexuals being marched to prison or to the station, Mexican citizens lined up to jeer the trains as they passed. In February 1917, *El Pueblo* reported on the crowds who catcalled the men arriving by train at Manzanillo port.⁸¹ Even comedians got in on the act. Manuel Maples Arce, founder of the Stridentist movement in Mexico and a critic of homosexuals, recalled that during the 1920s,

There was a manifest public aversion against *afeminados* (“*jotos*” in one of its many Mexican meanings) and they were happily satirized onstage. One of the funniest comedians, Joaquín Pardavé, who shared satire’s popularity with el *Panzón* Soto,⁸² presented a sketch that collected loud applause. A train appeared that carried—bound for the Islas Marias penal colony—a chain gang of prisoners that included, among thieves and other criminals, some *afeminados*. When the train stopped in what was supposed to be a station, Pardavé stuck his head out the window and with a powerful and manly voice said, addressing the public: “As for me, they take me for a thief!”⁸³

Pardavé’s sketch referenced the regularity with which *afeminados* could be found on the train, as well as other prisoners’ need to demonstrate their masculinity, lest they be labeled as an *afeminado*. Even a thief was more masculine—and therefore more Mexican—than the satirized homosexual, despite his delinquency, and the thief portrayed by the comedian took great pains to demonstrate his difference. The sketch may have originated with the Famous 41 story itself, particularly an article appearing in *El País* on November 23, 1901, in which a man upon hearing his name stated just before being consigned to military exile in the Yucatan, “Present, my Capitan; but let me assert that I am going as a thief; I am not one of them.” He thus signaled to

⁷⁹ Javier Piña y Palacios, “La colonia de las Islas Marias bajo la dirección del Gral. Francisco J. Múgica (1928-1933),” in *La colonia penal de las Islas Marias*, ed. Javier Piña y Palacios (Mexico, D.F.: Ediciones Botas, 1970), 47.

⁸⁰ Aguilar, *Los métodos criminales*, 186.

⁸¹ “Fueron silbados los afeminados.”

⁸² Soto was another famous comedian of the first half of the 20th century.

⁸³ Manuel Maples Arce, *Soberana Juventud* (Madrid: Plenitud, 1967), 142.

the *afeminados* nearby, provoking laughs from those present “because not even the thief wanted to be confused with the *perfumados*, as the soldiers called them in the barracks.”⁸⁴ Thus, ridiculed as “anti-Mexicans” and herded into trains with hardened criminals, violent offenders, and political prisoners, homosexuals found themselves discursively and physically excised from the nation itself. What thoughts haunted the men as they traveled uncomfortably trains towards the coast, drawing ever closer to the “tomb of the Pacific” and their exile?

Arriving at the “Las Lindas Mariposas”

Although the colony was only sixty miles from shore, there was not regular service from Nayarit, meaning that ports a much greater distance away were required.⁸⁵ Trains carrying the *cuerdas* arrived at the ports of Mazatlán, Sinaloa and Manzanillo, Colima by train, men were then loaded onto “deficient ships” ferried that prisoners and visitors as part of the “irregular service” serving the colony. This made for a long, uncomfortable trip, even for a regular passenger. “From Mazatlán,” wrote one visitor, “it is one night, or 12 to 16 hours. From Manzanillo it is two nights and a day, or 34 to 40 hours.”⁸⁶ Prisoners often arrived from the latter port, transferring first from train to a ship, then “crowded into the holds like animals” or packed together like “bales of cotton” or other commodities for sale.⁸⁷ When arriving at Puerto Balleto, they disembarked looking “miserable”, “sad”, “hungry”, and “flaccid”.⁸⁸ Similarly, Martínez Ortega described the arriving men as a “wretched and ragged herd, terrified of the prison’s legend of horror.”⁸⁹

Among these were political prisoners (at various times communists and *cristeros*), hardened

⁸⁴ “El baile de solo hombres,” 1. *Perfumados* were literally “perfumed ones”, which was slang for dandified homosexuals

⁸⁵ Nayarit is one of the least populous and developed of Mexico’s states.

⁸⁶ Bojórquez, *Maria Madre del archipelago*, 23.

⁸⁷ Martínez Ortega, *La Isla*, 27; Figaro, “¿Todo el mundo a las Islas?,” *El Universal*, August 3, 1929, 3, 5.

⁸⁸ “Las Islas Marías,” 5.

⁸⁹ Martínez Ortega, *La Isla*, 27.

criminals, and drug addicts, to homosexuals. “Lombroso could encounter among these the most interesting types!” *Detective* magazine enthusiastically effused.⁹⁰ All had arrived in the colony’s laboratory of criminological methods where prisoners, tasked with “purging their crimes.”⁹¹

The average inmate was right to be pessimistic about their incarceration, as once in the colony, prisoners were to face two types of prison: the first being isolated from their peers in solitary, then incarceration through shared work projects.⁹² The islands could be harsh, with at times miserably hot and humid climate and periodic shortages of food. In addition, the men faced intense labor requirements, such as in the salt mines (Salinas) or in various agricultural and construction jobs.⁹³ Leaving the island was difficult at the conclusion of a sentence. Many inmates were “beyond hope of regeneration,”⁹⁴ reported *Detectives*. Former inmates returned to the colony, at times by choice, but frequently involuntarily on the basis of their “notoriety”; upon their return to “civilization”, the same individuals, without committing another crime, could be relegated again due to their antecedents in the police records registry.⁹⁵

Many men suffered melancholy and psychological withdrawal in addition to the physical removal from the nation that had deemed them irredeemable.⁹⁶ At night, they sang melancholy songs that told “something of their desperation, of their nights tortured by desire.”⁹⁷ Indeed, “they [sang] while crying and in their songs replete with memories, they yearn[ed] for lost loves

⁹⁰ “Las Islas Marías,” 5. Cesare Lombroso was an (in)famous Italian criminologist and founder of the Italian School of Positivist Criminology.

⁹¹ “Cuerda a las islas,” *Excelsior*, August 2, 1929, sec. 1, 9.

⁹² Dávalos Hurtado, “El problema antropológico,” 70. Dávalos’s piece was written in 1945.

⁹³ Such work was immortalized for the Mexican public in the 1951 film “Las Islas Marías”, directed by Emilio Fernandez and starring Pedro Infante who plays a man who sacrifices himself in order to protect his family after a murder committed by his sibling. Infante’s character, like other inmates portrayed in the film, is harshly worked.

⁹⁴ “Las Islas Marías,” 5.

⁹⁵ Jose Angel Cenicerros, “El problema de las Islas Marías,” *Criminalia* X, no. 11 (1944): 646. Some men also found it hard to return due to the material costs of the return trip, as they often received little to facilitate their return. Notoriety also could limit their prospects for housing or work should they be able to return.

⁹⁶ “Las Islas Marías,” 5, 10.

⁹⁷ Martínez Ortega, *La Isla*, 31.

and distant lands where their hopes and liberty were orphaned.”⁹⁸ For these reasons, many prisoners viewed the islands as a “tomb”; combined with the heat and isolation, it also became a “white hell.”⁹⁹ Seven men, between 1932 and April 1937 attempted suicide; two succeeded.¹⁰⁰

At Islas Marias, authorities easily achieved their goal of isolating criminals from the nation and “civilization”. Like other rural colonies, authorities intended the penal colony to be a place focused on “the regeneration of the guilty through work.”¹⁰¹ Under the hot sun, workers could pay back their debt through their toil, thereby fulfilling the requirements of their relegation and earning freedom, all the while being segregated from the society they had wronged. The island also made an ideal prison; its distance from the shore made escape difficult. Fewer guards were needed (or available), as the sea provided the colony’s “walls” and abundant sharks and manta rays to deter men from the water.¹⁰² While there were discreet camps of men—and one of women—around the island, these were only separated by space, rather than by walls. Prisoners thus could mill about when not being “rehabilitated” through work in the salt mines or other activities. Prisoners also mingled with employees and free colonists, opened their own petty businesses, attended education courses, and participated in colony social life.

⁹⁸ Miguel Gil, *La tumba del Pacífico*, vol. 2, vol. 2 (Mexico: Ediciones de “La Prensa”, 1932), 21, 50. Gil describes an evening walk where he encounters a group of eighteen men, standing in a circle, and singing under the stars as the sound of the waves crashed on the island’s shore. The songs, like “El Frijolito” by Lorenzo Barcelata and “La Prietita” were sad and plaintive in tone.

⁹⁹ Bojórquez, *Maria Madre del archipelago*, 23. Gil, *La tumba del Pacífico*, vol. 2, 51, 59. Gil states that the term “white hell” came from the color of the ground, particularly that in the salt mines (Salinas) where, according to him, men died by the hundreds at the indifference of the management. This seems unlikely, since other sources do not report such deaths, even as the work was indeed harsh.

¹⁰⁰ Julio Cesar Palma, *La verdad sobre las Islas Marias: Panorama geográfico, histórico, y sociológico* (Mexico, D.F., 1938), 89.

¹⁰¹ Manuel Andrade, “Reglamento interior de la Colonia Penal de las Islas Marias, de 10 de marzo de 1920,” in *Nuevo Código Penal para el Distrito y territorios federales y leyes complementarias* (Mexico: Herrero Hermanos Sucesores, 1930), 513.

¹⁰² In the case of the manta rays, the deterrent was due to their size and undeserved reputation, rather than actual threat. A writer in 1911 described them as able to suck the flesh off a man’s bones. See Harry H. Dunn, “Sailing on Tropical Seas, Part II: From Mazatlan to Manzanillo,” *The Rudder*, March 1911. Dunn noted the large numbers of sharks and rays around the Islas Marias. Gil noted the presence of large numbers of sharks in the early 1930s. See the second volume of Gil, *La tumba del Pacífico*, vol. 2. Humans, in fact, are those who threaten manta rays.

Homosexuals had their own barracks on the island, which were located distant from the other barracks. This offered the men a measure of privacy, a site for community building, and some security, although this was not prison officials' original intent. According to Heriberto Navarrete, a Jesuit priest and member of the Asociación Católica de la Juventud Mexicana, these barracks were under tight surveillance in 1927, meaning that he and the other exiles—many of them Catholic rebels—only met homosexuals when they worked in the food service.¹⁰³ However, such surveillance and segregation had already diminished by Múgica's administration a year later, even as homosexuals continued to have their own barracks.¹⁰⁴

Prisoners had a number of names for the islands. Some, like *las tres*, referred directly to the number of islands, while *islote*, a term normally used to describe a “small island”, referred to the relative size of the islands (in comparison with the immensity of the ocean).¹⁰⁵ Inmates showcased irony and black humor by applying the verbs *hacer un viaje*, or “to take a trip”, and *veranear*, or “to spend one's summer vacation” to a term spent at the colony under the hot sun. This was a reference to the irony of being incarcerated in such beautiful islands.¹⁰⁶

Terms such as *las lindas mariposas*, evoked this natural beauty.¹⁰⁷ Yet the same phrase, as well as the simplified *mariposas*, also referenced the association of the penal colony with homosexuals. Since the colonial period, *mariposa* had served as a term for male homosexuality. Seventeenth-century friar Pedro de León likened sodomites to butterflies, remarking that both were attracted by open flames: the butterfly by the temptation of a candle and the sodomite by

¹⁰³ Heriberto Navarrete, S. J., *En las Islas Mariás* (Mexico: Editorial Jus, S.A., 1965), 71.

¹⁰⁴ This laxness may have been a product of Múgica's own open-mindedness, given his own “exile” to the Islands, or a recognition of the difficulties in thwarting interactions between men due to the practical realities of colony.

¹⁰⁵ Aguilar, *Los métodos criminales*, 203-204. *Islote* also may have invoked the isolation felt by prisoners many miles from home. Other terms included *champerico* and *chomperico*, which I was unable to decipher.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 203, 216.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 204. It may have also been metaphorical, referring to the “fragility” of the islands against the sea.

that of sinful sex which would burn him in the fires of hell.¹⁰⁸ The idea of a “butterfly” also captured the presumed effeminacy of homosexuals, as butterflies were dainty, fragile creatures.

By the twentieth century, *mariposa* became a “universal” term utilized throughout Latin America to refer to an “obvious, flighty queen.”¹⁰⁹ Thus, referring to the islands as the “pretty butterflies” referenced through a tongue-in-cheek double *entendre*; appropriately, many incarcerated *mariposas* dressed flamboyantly. As Martínez Ortega recalled about the weekly cultural gatherings held on Sundays,

They arrived painstakingly powdered, their eyes enlarged with mascara, their mouths reddened, with false beauty marks, and usually long, artistically-styled hair. With their open-chest, silk shirts, their exaggeratedly broad pants, and their colorful scarves tied at the neck, they were arbiters of fashion.¹¹⁰

Their fashions contrasted sharply from the straw hats and plain clothes of other inmates.

Indeed, although queer men must have feared the colony’s dangers (such as from other inmates) and the island’s isolation far away from their friends, family, lovers, and familiar urban haunts, they nevertheless found opportunities at the colony. The islands, like mainland prisons to a lesser degree, offered a space in which *afeminados* could openly congregate and hunt for an available—and horny—man, of which there were plenty. As Martínez Ortega wrote, when disembarking, homosexuals realized that they had benefited from a stroke of luck:

The homosexuals had a frankly provocative air. They were confident of having arrived in paradise, and certainly, they were not wrong. What more could be hoped for in a place where eight hundred men and twenty women, all prisoners, live together?¹¹¹

They had, after all, arrived at *las mariposas*, and being “butterflies” themselves, they saw the

¹⁰⁸ Federico Garza Carvajal, *Butterflies Will Burn: Prosecuting Sodomites in Early Modern Spain and Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 1-2.

¹⁰⁹ Stephen O. Murray, *Latin American Male Homosexualities* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 186. Obviously, the aforementioned La Mariposa situated himself in the legacy of the term by taking the name and also appropriating it in a positive manner.

¹¹⁰ Martínez Ortega, *La Isla*, 20.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

opportunities to flit from flower to flower of Mexican masculinity under a tropical sun, along the island's beaches, and in the salty, sultry air laden with sensual, tropical aphrodisiacs, at night.

II: Long Walks on the Beach Between Men, or the “Sexual Problem” in the Islas Marías

Criminologists worried about the *mariposas*' influence on the general prison population. For these observers, such influence was amplified by the distance from home, the men's limited agency (i.e., few opportunities to “feel manly”), a lack of available women, and an “emasculating” climate that encouraged semi-nudity and sexual adventures. Together, these created the colony's “sexual problem.” Indeed, despite homosexuals' purported “weakness” and effeminacy, many observers believed they possessed the powers through social interaction to convert others—even the most masculine and hardened criminals—to perversion..¹¹²

Journalist José Raúl Aguilar offered a humorous anecdote in *Los métodos criminales en México: cómo defendernos* that illustrates this concern. In the story, a convicted thug is forced to travel on a train full of homosexuals against his will; the thug claimed this was “an insult to his manhood,” given that “he was the only heterosexual among them, apart from the guards.” He thus went kicking and screaming onto the train, and once aboard, threatened his companions with death.¹¹³ His ranting was so loud that passing guards could hear it some distance away. However, within a short time,

the guard noticed that the voice of the man was going down in tone, confidence, and strength. As this was more than strange and fearing the worst, the guard returned upon hearing that the thug was not shouting nor rampaging. At the [guard's] inquiry about the cause—upon seeing him already seated together with his travelling companions—the unhappy thug responded with a high-pitched and effeminate voice, like that of the rest, “Ay, you, it's that already I'm tired of shouting because these [*afeminados*] ignore

¹¹² Perhaps the *afeminados* perfume was to blame, as effeminate homosexuals in general were purported to have exactly the traits that would entice men.

¹¹³ Aguilar, *Los métodos criminales*, 180.

me!”¹¹⁴

“What horror!” concluded Aguilar, “The environment dominated the thug!”¹¹⁵

While Aguilar’s anecdote was “a joke” about homosexuals and what they could and would do, he asserted that his story could convert into “reality” in the single-sex environments of the prison, school, barracks, and monastery. It is hard not to wonder if Aguilar sat around fantasizing about the powers of the “third sex” through which even criminal men could be degenerated further. Nevertheless, the fearful stereotype he and others articulated was based on the reality that many men did turn to homosexuals for sexual and emotional satisfaction, whether or not such activity was due to a single-sex environment, legitimate interest, or both.

This sexual problem was, at least for one observer, the colony’s gravest and most and “difficult to resolve.”¹¹⁶ This was due to the reality that men often outnumbered women more significantly. Martínez Ortega stated that 800 men and twenty women (40 men for every woman) were incarcerated during her time as secretary for General Múgica.¹¹⁷ The provisional 1936 census of the islands only listed seventeen incarcerated women, in contrast to 579 men.¹¹⁸ Although some inmates brought their families with them, most inmates did not.¹¹⁹ The distance from inmates’ homes, the irregular transportation, and women’s reluctance to have themselves *de*

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 180-181. The word used here is “estas”, the feminine form of “these” which doesn’t have an English counterpart; hence, the use of the parenthetical *afeminados*.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 181.

¹¹⁶ Bojórquez, *Maria Madre del archipelago*, 146. In this observers of the Islas Mariás were not alone, as criminologists and some mainland authorities remained preoccupied with satisfying prisoners’ sexual needs in prisons like Lecumberri, as I have already described.

¹¹⁷ Martínez Ortega, *La Isla*, 29. Gil also stated 800 inmates, with an unspecified number of free people living on the island. See Gil, *La tumba del Pacífico*, vol. 1, 140.

¹¹⁸ Bojórquez, *Maria Madre del archipelago*, 69. As noted above, Martínez Ortega listed the population at 800 male inmates and 20 females during her stay in the islands.

¹¹⁹ Ernestina Venegas, “Vivimos en la cárcel con papá,” in *La colonia penal de las Islas Mariás*, ed. Javier Piña y Palacios (Mexico, D.F.: Ediciones Botas, 1970), 97-102. Venegas lived with her family there for the first 17 years of her life. After a period of time at the colony, prisoners also could ask the Director’s permission to bring his wife or another previously-known woman to “keep him company” or to “live the marital life with him”, i.e., to serve as a regular companion or provider of conjugal visits. See Héctor Villarreal V., “Breve informe sobre la colonia penal de las Islas Mariás, Nay.” (UNAM, 1939), 55.

facto relegated to the islands limited this privilege's use.

Some prisoners tried to woo the handful of women—both inmates and colonists—who lived on the island. Male inmates frequently socialized after work with women near their barracks at Rehilete, hoping for a tryst, a date, or more.¹²⁰ Incarcerated women had the right to marry should a prospective husband appear; while already married women—whether inmates or colonists—could and did prove interested in sexual affairs.¹²¹ For example, between 1932-1937, authorities noted that eight married women (presumably the wives of colony employees or employees themselves) had maintained affairs with inmates.¹²² During the same period, twenty-five inmates were charged with introducing girls to prostitution, while four inmates were caught in “indecorous acts” with underage girls.¹²³ Inmates also turned to pornography, which was readily available.¹²⁴ Some made their own obscene art; one author noted that it was normal to find “clearly pornographic subjects” in as poems, drawings, and paintings.¹²⁵

However, these solutions were insufficient and men's sexual appetites remained significant, leading them to turn to the numerous, interested, and willing *afeminados*. As Martínez Ortega vividly described the “sexual problem”,

The vigilance was always mocked by the savage momentum of those men that never curbed a desire, and that, here, were playing around, just to satisfy their instincts. It

¹²⁰ Judith Martínez Ortega, “Visión de las Islas Marías,” *Criminalia* IV, no. 1 (September 1, 1937): 116.

¹²¹ Bojórquez, *Maria Madre del archipiélago*, 72.

¹²² Palma, *La verdad sobre las Islas Marías*, 90. These numbers are likely understated, as they represent only the “official” tally of those actually caught.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 89. Thirty inmates were also cited for having “related obscenities” to youths.

¹²⁴ Alfredo Pérez Espinosa, “El Penal de Islas Marías,” *Criminalia* IV, no. 2 (October 1937): 123. Pérez Espinosa was a student of criminologist Raúl Carrancá y Trujillo.

¹²⁵ Dr. Francisco Elizarrarás, “Proyecto de reorganización médico, psiquiátrica del penal de las Islas Marías,” *Criminalia* III, no. 9 (May 1937): 470. This is similar to the realities in the 1930s in Lecumberri penitentiary described by Raúl González Enríquez, where inmates used drawings, music, and poetry to express their sexual desires. See Raul González Enríquez, *El problema sexual del hombre en la penitenciaría* (Mexico: Editorial Citlaltepetl, 1971), 247. It stands to reason that since Lecumberri served as the original prison for many of the exiled inmates at Islas Marías, that they continued similar drawings and writings—including sketches of women in the bathrooms, obscene offers of sex written on the walls, and “works by pederasts” illustrating their interests to other inmates, one they had arrived in the islands.

didn't matter who they were: male or female. No differences existed. They were just people that had been thrown into a bonfire without hesitation by "someone." The men went crazy, truly, without restrictions. In this oppressive climate, the will eventually gives into all sensuality, all abnormality, all madness.¹²⁶

In such an environment, men could serve as sexual outlets for other men, due to the influences of the climate and their sensual and unbridled desires that found few other satisfactory outlets.

Reformers proposed several additional solutions. Segregation was one and was intended to protect the "real men", rather than "weak homosexuals," because homosexuals "certainly provoke[d] the bestial appetites of the inmates" which in excess "would give rise to the most dreadful of disorders."¹²⁷ Indeed, the *afeminados*' provocative manner, particularly by Múgica's administration, proved successful in attracting male attention, and the enthusiasm that men showed in response threatened the colony's "redemptive" mission. However, segregation proved impossible given the need for homosexuals as workers in "feminine" jobs (like cooking and cleaning), the lack of physical barriers, and a chronic shortage of guards.

Another solution was a trifecta of labor, health, and piety based on organized work, good food, and religious practices.¹²⁸ The idea was to harness, ironically, the very aspects of the island—its tropical locale, marine environment, and isolation—that were seen as permissive to sexual deviance to regenerate the inmates instead. The islands were believed to have curative properties like other rural areas. "Those coming ill," wrote Gil, "heal within a few months. It is the sun that purifies them, cleaning them morally and corporally, even though their skin blackens."¹²⁹ Unfortunately, inmates disdained working—and even more, education—which surprised observer Juan de Dios (Djed) Bojórquez. "It appears incredible," he wrote, "that in the

¹²⁶ Martínez Ortega, "Visión de las Islas Marías," 116.

¹²⁷ "Las Islas Marías," 5, 10.

¹²⁸ Espinosa, "El Penal de Islas Marías," 123.

¹²⁹ Gil, *La tumba del Pacífico*, vol. 1, 140.

solitude in which they live, work does not serve to distract and console them.”¹³⁰

Bojórquez argued that alcoholic drinks and other stimulants should be prohibited; in their place, all types of sports should be encouraged. “The games in the open air and swimming serve to counter the natural inclinations of sexual pleasure,” he wrote.¹³¹ After all, inmates showed talents for boxing, baseball, and basketball, besting challengers from the colony’s employees and the occasional team from docked ships; if they were not going to do honest work, then athletics could prove to be an effective regenerative tool.¹³² Such an argument rested on the belief that sports, work, and fresh air could cure homosexuality and other social ills which were caused by the agglutination of individuals in urban spaces that were contrary to a man’s natural impulses.¹³³

However, neither the fresh air nor the availability of work or sports were deemed sufficient, so reformers turned to more extreme ideas. One idea was increase conjugal visits either by augmenting the number of female inmates so they could live with or marry the men or by making it easier for “wives or concubines” to come to the island with the men.¹³⁴

Yet, female inmates were wary and even opportunistic in regards to the men’s appetites.¹³⁵ Many, cognizant of their status in a buyer’s market, sought to benefit monetarily from the “conversations” that administrators encouraged them to have with men. This did not sit

¹³⁰ Bojórquez, *Maria Madre del archipielago*, 77.

¹³¹ Ibid., 147.

¹³² Less athletically inclined individuals could perform in the band, which serenaded fans during the games. See Villarreal V., “Breve informe sobre la colonia penal,” 45. Interestingly enough, many of the musicians seem to have been homosexual. A photo appearing in 1932 shows the men posing for the camera, partially in feminine attire and holding instruments. See “Los hijos de la desvergüenza,” *Detective*, May 30, 1932.

¹³³ Thus, the criminological axiom: cities would degrade an individual’s morality, while the countryside could and would regenerate them. Such an axiom also fit with the populist, rural-as-authentically-Mexican message of the Mexican government, which proclaimed that rural work and experience could reform those corrupted by the city. See for example the previously cited “La escuela al aire libre y sus magníficos resultados en el campo de la educación.” The Cubans in the 1960s and 1970s would use the same logic to try to “work” gay men into “real” men in their military camps.

¹³⁴ Villarreal V., “Breve informe sobre la colonia penal,” 55; Bojórquez, *Maria Madre del archipielago*, 146. Conjugal visits had been pioneered by Raúl González Enríquez in the capital’s prisons. See González Enríquez, *El problema sexual*.

¹³⁵ Perhaps some were interested in the other female prisoners instead, but I cannot confirm this at present.

well with observers; as *Detectives* magazine lamented in 1932, “few were those who have or may have available a half peso in the Island.”¹³⁶ Even though men of good behavior could earn up to a peso daily, because such money was unavailable until the completion of their sentence since it was deposited in an account.¹³⁷ Women’s desires for compensation thus raised two problems. First, many men lacked the resources to obtain services and such services were of dubious legality. Second, the actions degraded the women without alleviating the “sexual problem” and amounted to a form of state sanctioned prostitution at a time the state was getting out of that business.¹³⁸ How could authorities morally condemn the actions of those inciting teenage girls into prostitution, if they were going to then expect those girls to offer their services as soon as they were of age? And if they were not paid and did as *Detectives* implied, they would be involved in what amounted to be sexual slavery. Perhaps recognizing the difficulty of implementing these solutions, Bojórquez suggested the most extreme: excursions to mainland ports for “inmates who have good conduct and who can be left in liberty for various hours in order to satisfy their necessities.”¹³⁹ It is not clear if the risks of such excursions—the inmates could run away, after all—were discussed. Instead, excursions were seen as tools to alleviate the “great calamity” and “most painful” reality facing the inmates: the lack of “love”, which “could

¹³⁶ “Las Islas Marías,” 5, 10. Nor were the women doing their “duty” to fulfill the men’s needs for free, which was the implication of the article.

¹³⁷ Villarreal V., “Breve informe sobre la colonia penal,” 54. Men may not have had access to the fund they were earning.

¹³⁸ If the administration condoned their behaviors, they would be sanctioning aberrant forms of female sexuality that marked women in the city as sexual deviants and which were periodically “reformed” through roundups, incarcerations, public health campaigns, and even exile to the Islas Marías. The 1930s—the same decade in which debate on Islas Marías and the “sexual problem” of prisons intensified—was also a decade of transition in the legal status and public image of prostitution. Although legal since 1872 and reformed in the subsequent decades, in the 1930s prostitution became a target of abolitionists—including feminists interested in women’s rights, eugenicists who argued prostitution spread venereal disease (which undermined the Mexican race), and reformers who wanted to curb male sexual appetites. By 1940, legal prostitution had been abolished, even as the practice continued.

¹³⁹ Bojórquez, *Maria Madre del archipiélago*, 146.

not have natural expansions” in the islands.¹⁴⁰ The solutions offered by the reformers did not have the desired effects—or were never fully implemented—as successive observers described the same “sexual problem.” Francisco Elizarraras, writing in *Criminalia*, lamented that it was “very common [for inmates] to organize proselytes on the basis of the most pernicious sexual practices (masturbation, homosexuality, etc.).”¹⁴¹ These turned the penal colony into “a fecund school of onanism and homosexuality,” wrote noted criminologist Raúl Carrancá y Trujillo.¹⁴²

Thus, like its counterparts on the mainland, the Islas Marías penal colony offered a place in which sexual deviance—along with other forms of delinquency—could and did proliferate. What set the colony apart was its “openness” and climate, both of which were conducive to interactions between men. As Bojórquez lamented, “to the forced abstinence in which one lives on the island is added the weather and marine environment, thereby augmenting lust. Everything favors carnal desires.”¹⁴³ This “ecological determinism” in a largely single-sex environment meant that rather being rehabilitative, the penal colony of the Islas Marías—the most advanced solution for the societal ills of political disobedience, delinquency, and homosexuality—became a school of the vices that the Mexican nation had sought to eliminate. An isolated, rural setting did not eliminate the problems found in urban prisons, and the freedom to mingle with other inmates offered many opportunities for casual sex. Rehabilitation was thus undermined.

Detectives magazine noted that despite the “special care” authorities took in their

¹⁴⁰ “Las Islas Marías,” 5, 10.

¹⁴¹ Elizarraras, “Proyecto de reorganización,” 470.

¹⁴² Raúl Carrancá y Trujillo, “Breve Comento,” in *“Maria Madre del Archipiélago”, Islas Marías en el Océano Pacífico* (Mexico, D.F.: Talleres tipográficos de A. del Bosque, 1937), 180. This is not to say that these “proselytes” were homosexual in identity, but that they certainly were learning “pernicious sexual practices”; whether their teachers were the exiled *afeminados* or other inmates is not explained. Indeed, it is likely that not all of the men who engaged in sex with other men were of the homosexual “type”; many were availing themselves of the sexual opportunities that presented themselves, without associating such activities or partner preferences with a distinct social identity. This did not mean, however, they were not interested in openly seeking out such pleasures and teaching them to others.

¹⁴³ Bojórquez, *Maria Madre del archipiélago*, 147.

administration of the island—which seems an ironic phrase in retrospect given the lack of vigilance in many cases—it was “impossible to avoid the foul promiscuity of these subjects [homosexuals], and therefore, it is nothing to find a guy who suddenly says, ‘Oh you...! Can you not see my beloved is angry?’”¹⁴⁴

Beyond Casual Sex: Homosexual “Types” and “Married” Relationships between Inmates

Now that the “sexual problem” has been defined, there are more interesting questions to pose. Here are two: 1. was there more than opportunistic sex occurring, particularly given the rhetoric of “love” used by authorities? And 2. were any of these men true “proselytes” or interested in homosexual behaviors beyond the confines of their incarceration? The simple answer was “yes.” As noted above, homosexuals as a “type”—i.e., those who were not simply interested in casual homosexual activity but had an associated lifestyle or identity—did exist at the colony; they, after all, were those who formed part of the *cuerdas*. These men created a community for themselves and had important interactions with other men that provided them with frameworks to seek out relationships beyond momentary sexual desires occurring during the feverish nights.

How many homosexuals were on the island at any given time? Although the census data I have seen made no mention of the number of homosexuals on the island, clues do exist. Enough homosexuals existed to warrant their own barracks. According to Navarrete, fifteen *afeminados* were incarcerated there without fixed sentences during his time as a prisoner in 1927.¹⁴⁵

Journalist Miguel Gil visited the islands in the early 1930s and noted that “the *invertido* is a common and usual type on the island, and you will see them...they are curious.”¹⁴⁶ Both

¹⁴⁴ “Las Islas Marías,” 5, 10.

¹⁴⁵ Navarrete, S. J., *En las Islas Marías*, 71. It is unknown if these men were the whole of the homosexual population or represented a fraction that Navarrete came in contact with.

¹⁴⁶ Gil, *La tumba del Pacífico*, vol. 1, 152.

Bojórquez and Martínez Ortega noted the abundance of homosexuals on the island. And, given the hysteria of penal specialists about the effects of homosexuals on the prison population, only two possibilities exist: either such hysteria was out of proportion to the numbers of homosexuals in the colony, or the numbers were significant enough to cause genuine alarm.¹⁴⁷

Julio César Palma's *La verdad sobre las Islas Marias* offers some statistical insight into the "sexual problem." Palma stated that between 1932 and 1937 fifty inmates "lived a marital life with inverts" (*hacen vida marital*), with the inmates (*reclusos*) being clearly referred to differently than the homosexuals (*invertidos*); employees were also labeled separately. In other words, on the basis of their difference, *invertidos* became a special class. Since there is no indication that the numbers Palma provided corresponded to casual sex, that means approximately one hundred individuals engaged in more sustained homosexual behavior—fifty inmates and fifty *invertidos*—during those years. In addition, six other men—two employees, two married men, and two *invertido* teachers—were listed in relations with other men, raising the total to one hundred twelve. Six more *invertidos* committed "obscene acts" with male youths (of unspecified ages) living in the colony. If these are assumed to be separate individuals, then the total is at least one hundred eighteen. Even if some are duplicates there still remained a sizeable number of men engaged in longer-term same-sex behaviors in this period and fifty-eight are labeled as *invertidos*.¹⁴⁸ These numbers do not include single queer men, but are nevertheless remarkable, as such a number of relationships would have been very visible to the colony.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ In Villarreal's section "Vida Sexual" (pages 55-56), no mention is made of homosexuals, but his work seems to be an outlier in this regard.

¹⁴⁸ Such a number was larger than the number of women available on the island; consider the 20 women cited by Martínez Ortega during her tenure at the colony. Moreover, these numbers were much larger than heterosexual "deviance", such as affairs, reported in the same period.

¹⁴⁹ While Palma's numbers are over a five-year period, the reality of the sentences being doubled for inmates at the penal colony suggests that the turnover for homosexual "criminals", like other criminals, was not rapid; moreover, the arbitrary nature of the imprisonment in the first place means that many individuals were returned multiple times.

Palma's numbers—which give no information about the men's sex/gender personas and favored sex roles—may only represent a fraction of what actually occurred.¹⁵⁰ As I have discussed, homosexuals were frequent targets for the *cuerdas*. Not all homosexuals were effeminate; one homosexual on the island who owned a business and was masculine in appearance—even going so far as appearing in a photo as a Mexican cowboy—was named El Rafles.¹⁵¹ The islands also served as a destination for homosexual employees: four are mentioned in Palma's text, and Martínez Ortega asserted that the “sexual problem” between employees was as great as that between inmates.¹⁵² How many, like the *afeminados*, saw the island as an opportunity to serve their own sexual interests, as well as their nation? How many were not represented in the Palma's statistics, if these depended on visibility to define them as a “type”?¹⁵³

Beyond these omissions, Palma's data presents tantalizing glimpses of the colony's homosexual culture. When describing the *invertido/recluso* pairs, Palma uses the phrase *hacen vida marital*, and he does not explain exactly what “marital life” means in his usage or if he has insights into the sexual roles individuals played.¹⁵⁴ He does, however, mark it as distinct from *en amasiato*, a phrase he used to describe cases of infidelity, both heterosexual and homosexual, or mixed couples in which one individual was an inmate but the other was free, a status the only

Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that this constituted a significant portion of the population, particularly when considered that these were only the men who lived with other men, not those who engaged in sexuality, whether regular or infrequent.

¹⁵⁰ The true numbers of queer men and those engaged in queer activities were likely much higher. Here I am using the understanding of “queer men” to include interactions between men who sought only interactions with other men, as well as interactions between men who had both male and female partners. “Queer interactions” also includes men who did not identify with either a queer gender or sexual persona or identity but that still had sex with other men. Youths—whose own proclivity for homosexual activity was frequently documented in the Tribunal de Menores—may have practiced their own queer activities; this too, aside from the cited instances of adults engaging in obscene acts with boys, is missing from the numbers.

¹⁵¹ I discuss him more in the next section.

¹⁵² Martínez Ortega, *La Isla*, 31.

¹⁵³ Indeed, relationships that were more discrete may have escaped notice.

¹⁵⁴ Palma may have assumed, based on distinctions he made between *reclusos* and *invertidos*, that the latter played the “passive”, “feminine” roles, but he does not openly speculate on this, so we should not take this as a given.

homosexual employees enjoyed.¹⁵⁵ The phrase *hacen vida marital* never appears in these examples. Although both could be euphemisms for sexual relations between individuals and living together “as if married” while not having that status, the differing use begs the question as to why the fifty *invertido/recluso* pairs deserved a separate category.

I believe the separate categorization signified a difference in quality, that is, that the relationships were of a longer-term and more dedicated variety than the others. One clue is found in the fights between individuals on the island. Between 1932-1937, five documented fights occurred between inmates over homosexual lovers, and eight occurred between *invertidos* over inmates.¹⁵⁶ Given the number of available men on the island, the appearance of such fights—on both “sides”, as it were, of the binary Palma described—suggests more than casual, no-strings-attached sex ongoing between the men. Why would men need or want to fight with such variety of options available, even if some inmates (or *invertidos*) were preferred over others? If they only wanted sex, it was readily available; one only had to go to the area around the kitchens to find homosexuals offering their “services” on a nightly basis.¹⁵⁷

Another clue exists in the jobs that homosexuals inhabited. Since many served as domestic workers—such as housekeepers for employees or servers in the food lines—it is not unreasonable to think that they applied these skills to their domestic lives. Consider the interest that the prisoners in Lecumberri showed in having a “home” in prison, rather than simply a bare cell without “feminine touches”, which I described in the previous chapter. A sort of normalcy could have been achieved, therefore, by entering into a relationship with an *afeminado* or

¹⁵⁵ The examples of infidelity on the island that he described are as follows: two married men had affairs with *invertidos*, while eleven married men had affairs with women (including the female inmates and employees) and eight women had similar affairs with male inmates. In addition, two other men—single employees—are listed as *en amasiato* with homosexuals, while two “invert” teachers are listed as *en amasiato* with inmates.

¹⁵⁶ Palma, *La verdad sobre las Islas Marias*, 89-90.

¹⁵⁷ Martínez Ortega, *La Isla*, 86.

invertido, in so far as relationships with homosexuals offered the domestic benefits that were normally absent in a prison for most inmates—if not always for the homosexuals themselves. Prison thus could be made into a “home”, and the affection, care, and trust that could develop in such domestic relationships offered stability for men in an otherwise difficult environment.¹⁵⁸

A third piece of evidence supports my reading of the men’s relationships as more than only sexual. According to Martínez Ortega, the women of the colony competed with the homosexuals for the attention of the men. On Sundays after dinner, at the mandated theater event, homosexual “arbiters of fashion” would flaunt their style while the men watched, drawing attention to themselves. She wrote that:

They looked for a seat among their favorites, they sat together and talked loudly, commenting, laughing. The *machos* made fun of them, but readily accepted them and had no prejudice against them, but rather they were a source of fun if not great passions. The [female] colonists viewed them as genuine rivals.¹⁵⁹

Martínez Ortega’s observation reveals how many regular inmates, while finding humor in joking about and with the queer men, nevertheless did not necessarily express the same homophobic disdain that prison reformers—or inmates such as Navarrete and his Catholic colleagues—did towards homosexuals.¹⁶⁰ Of course, her observation may be a rosy rendering of a more complex picture, but the public visibility of the homosexuals and their behaviors in the 1930s suggests tacit tolerance, if not complete acceptance, of such actions in public by both the inmates and prison authorities. Moreover, Martínez Ortega suggested a congenial relationship between the homosexuals and the prisoners, rather than a hostile one; such a relationship is a sign of more meaningful interactions, friendships, and relationships beyond sexual paradigms.

¹⁵⁸ Aguirre makes a similar argument for prisoners in Peru. See Carlos Aguirre, *The Criminals of Lima and Their Worlds: the Prison Experience, 1850-1935* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 173.

¹⁵⁹ Martínez Ortega, *La Isla*, 21.

¹⁶⁰ Navarrete, S. J., *En las Islas Marias*, 72. Navarrete said it was worse serving time with the homosexuals than any other sort of criminal; presumably, this was because he was marked as “notorious” like they were and associated with a place known for its homosexuality, even though his religion was officially homophobic.

More importantly, she states that the females on the island considered the homosexuals “genuine rivals.” With so few women on the island, both female inmates and employees could have their pick of many eager, enthusiastic men. Yet, Martínez Ortega’s comment suggests that in fact, some men with whom the women did want a relationship were at least distracted by—if not openly interested in—the homosexuals and their fashion, voices, and antics. This was an odd comment to make if it were not true, and it points to the success that homosexuals had in enticing men.¹⁶¹ Without mutual affection—or even love—between men being desirable, how could the homosexuals have been true competitors for the women?¹⁶²

An final anecdote, which surprised Martínez Ortega herself, offers more concrete evidence of meaningful relationships. As she wrote,

I knew the most fantastic, most incredible things, such that my imagination never guessed... That’s how I once saw a man, almost a giant, a boxer by profession, in the fullness of life, with a swollen left pectoral, enormously inflamed. He had tattooed some initials, into his body, with the point of a knife: M.Z.V. They became infected. The wounds opened like flowers. The blood and the pus, draining on his torso, were the stems of these impressive flowers. Such was the price demanded by a childish homosexual, of beautiful eyes and languid manners, in order to have his favors.¹⁶³

The story is indeed incredible and unexpected: a young man, muscular and large, suffering infection and pain in order to wear his lover’s initials. That the boxer wanted (or acquiesced) to do so demonstrates the significance of his relationship with his lover, the boxer’s desire for his “favors” and the influence the beautiful-eyed homosexual had on him. Moreover, that the boxer wore the initials suggests he judged it worth the potential risk, whether from the displeasure of other inmates (stemming from homophobia and/or jealousy) or from prison officials concerned with the “sexual problem” for whom this tattoo would have been a public reminder of failure.

¹⁶¹ Evidence from Lecumberri in the same period on the frequency of heterosexual conjugal visits vs. the number of inmates in Lecumberri prison (about one in nine chose or were eligible for such visits) suggests that homosexual relationships were an appealing option for many inmates. See González Enríquez, *El problema sexual*.

¹⁶² “Las Islas Marías,” 5, 10.

¹⁶³ Martínez Ortega, *La Isla*, 32.

New offenses could warrant further punishment and longer sentences. Despite this, the two men risked punishment for their relationship. And we should acknowledge that there is confidence—even pride—in the boxer wearing the initials, a sense that he was unconcerned with protecting himself or his lover. This would seem to be an example of a sex/gender system that was distinct from heteronormative active/passive, masculine/feminine paradigms while also incorporating them. The painful, oozing wounds may have bolstered the boxer's masculine or social status, but they were also a visible reminder of his devotion; was his "suffering" thus a masculine expression of affection, a feminine one, or something more queer?¹⁶⁴

Given the popularity of boxing among employees and inmates,¹⁶⁵ it would not be unreasonable to assume that M.Z.V. cheered for his man during the frequent boxing competitions. Nor would it be hard to believe that other homosexuals attended the matches, either for their own lovers or to scope out prospective new lovers among the cheering fans and athletic boxers, particularly given the popularity of athletic masculinity in the period. Popular sporting events, like the Sunday theater, thus offered opportunities for same-sex socialization and homoerotic performances, as well as opportunities to meet longer-term partners.

In essence, the "sexual problem" that so concerned officials was actually an opportunity for homosexuals. In fact, the Islas Marías colony unintentionally provided opportunities for homosexuals that did not always exist on the mainland, not the least of which was a captive,

¹⁶⁴ While no mention of their preferred sexual roles is made, this anecdote demonstrates the inutility of understanding relationships solely with the traditional active/passive paradigm. The painful, oozing wounds may have in fact bolstered the boxer's masculine or social status, but they were also a visible reminder of his devotion to his male lover. Encapsulated in his actions, a glimmer of the affection between male lovers shines: the queer man's desire by the to have his lover branded with his initials; the willingness of the other to so publicly demonstrate his relationship, much like a heterosexual man would do in honor of his wife or girlfriend; the visible, even "masculine" endurance of pain as a symbol to others; and the perverse beauty of the experience, as told by Martínez Ortega, that made her question her prejudices. In fact, wearing the initials may not have entailed much of a risk at all—at least with other inmates—due to his health and reputation as a boxer or perhaps because so many others were in similar relationships, if not branded in the same way by their lovers' "childish" desires.

¹⁶⁵ Bojórquez, *Maria Madre del archipiélago*, 72.

interested audience from which prospective lovers and significant others could be chosen.¹⁶⁶

Removed from the metropole's watchful eye, homosexuals could live more openly as part of a larger community, and their acceptance by some prison authorities, like Múgica and Martínez, earned the consternation of reformers who could only explain the continued sexual problem by claiming that authorities permitted these behaviors through their ignorance of the links between sexuality and crime.¹⁶⁷ Such concerns notwithstanding, for a homosexual capable of making the most of his relegation in the 1930s, the "tomb of the Pacific" could be a sort of paradise.

* * *

A few caveats are in order. As noted above, the numbers cited from observers like Palma likely under-represent the amount of same-sex behaviors ongoing within the penal colony, particularly that which occurred between men who would have considered themselves as "real" *hombres*, rather than *afeminados*. No discussion is made of the instances of sexual violence occurring on the island. As several scholars have argued, prisons were notorious sites of male-male rape at the hands of other inmates, groups of inmates, or even guards and officials.¹⁶⁸ While the openness of the penal colony may have mitigated this problem to some extent—as men had

¹⁶⁶ Not to mention that the island must have been a "paradise" for aficionados of "rough trade", i.e., masculine, even "dangerous", heterosexually-identified males. In Mexican parlance, *chacales*.

¹⁶⁷ Elizarrarás, "Proyecto de reorganización," 470. This is a seeming contradiction, given the circulation of images and discourses linking homosexuality and crime. Perhaps Elizarrarás was frustrated with the openness of homosexuality on the island and assumed that the leaders must be woefully uneducated on the subject. Or perhaps he wanted to stoke his own credibility as a criminologist by showing he was up-to-date with such theories, in contrast to the individuals he criticized. In either case, it is highly unlikely that Múgica was not aware of such discourses, and it appears they did not overly factor into the treatment of homosexuals during his administration. But Elizarrarás may have been right that such behaviors were permitted by authorities.

¹⁶⁸ Pablo Piccato, "'Such a Strong Need': Sexuality and Violence in Belem Prison," in *Gender, Sexuality, and Power in Latin America Since Independence*, ed. William E. French and Katherine Elaine Bliss (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 86-108; Rob Buffington, "Los Jotos: Contested Visions of Homosexuality in Modern Mexico," in *Sex and Sexuality in Latin America*, ed. Daniel Balderston and Donna J. Guy (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 118-132; Martin Nesvig, "The Complicated Terrain of Latin American Homosexuality," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 81, no. 3 (2001): 689-729. Each of these were talking about the violence described in Roumagnac, *Los criminales*.

other activities to do and many willing homosexuals to satisfy desires—the use of sex as a tool of power and violence is unlikely to have been completely eliminated, given the penchant for men to “play around” in order to satisfy their instincts.

For example, Mexican writer José Revueltas described an instance of sexual violence between men in the colony in his novel *Los muros de agua* (*The Walls of Water*, 1941). Character El Marquesito is raped to death by El Charro, who revels in the demonstration of his masculine power.¹⁶⁹ Another individual, El Chato, tortured two homosexuals as a demonstration of his masculine prowess for a woman; these *novios* fled into the mountains only to be found dead later.¹⁷⁰ The novel is based on Revueltas’ experiences as an exiled communist at Islas Mariás during two forced sentences there in the early 1930s. Although Revueltas claimed the novel presented a “literary reality” rather than his “direct reflections”, scholars have noted that the experiences in the penal colony marked his literary oeuvre and provided him with his pantheon of marginal individuals, including the communist, homosexual, and thief.¹⁷¹ In addition, his incarceration coincided with Múgica’s administration, the daily life described by Martínez Ortega, and the time period described by observers cited in this chapter, which lends some credibility to the idea that such violence occurred during that time.¹⁷² Corroborating evidence is not found, however, in the other sources cited in this chapter; it is thus possible that sexual hierarchies—which utilized sexual violence as a means of control—were not as

¹⁶⁹ José Revueltas, *Los muros de agua* (Mexico, D.F.: Ediciones Era, 1978), 123.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 114, 150-151. *Novios* refers to them being boyfriends.

¹⁷¹ For more on Revueltas, his experience at the penal colony, and the novel, see Álvaro Ruiz Abreu, “Génesis de *Los muros de agua*,” in *Nocturno en que todo se oye* (Mexico, D.F.: UNAM, Ediciones Era, 1999), 83-97.

¹⁷² Indeed, Revueltas’ book contains a mix of homophobic criticism and seeming sympathy for those, like El Marquesito, who were violated. His novel depicts the penal colony in very cynical terms. On homophobia in his work, see Francisco Manzo-Robledo, “El discurso homofóbico: El caso de “*Los muros de agua*” de José Revueltas,” *Chasqui* 27, no. 2 (November 1998): 27-37. Revueltas discussed homosexuality as part of the Mexican psyche and social *machismo*. See the 1976 interview conducted by Seminario del CILL in Gustavo Sáinz et al., *Conversaciones con José Revueltas* (Veracruz: Universidad Veracruzana, Centro de Investigaciones Lingüístico-Literarias, 1977), 41. However, in 1975, Revueltas would sign a declaration along with many other scholars, writers, and activists denouncing homophobia and police violence.

pronounced as they were in other prisons. This is not to discredit the possibility that Revueltas described situations that actually did occur, but it is to question, as I did in earlier chapters, the assumption that prison life was always oriented around sexual violence and hierarchies.¹⁷³

Palma's number also do not include instances of mutual masturbation, casual sex, or other forms of homosexual interaction outside of relationships, i.e., the forms of "proselytizing" that worried reformers. Likewise, considerations of bisexuality were absent, whether situational—as in the case of male inmates availing themselves of homosexual opportunities in the absence of women—or by choice or inclination—as in the case of men having no overwhelming preference for either sex. The sexual world described by the reformers was, theoretically, oriented around heterosexual desire; yet, their own research showed that homosexual behaviors did not disappear with conjugal availability.

The most glaring omission in the texts on the "sexual problem" was any consideration of female-female sexuality. Sexual needs were nearly always represented as within the male domain. Nor were women seen as sexual equals, as the efforts of authorities to get the female inmates "to converse" with male inmates demonstrates. Unfortunately, this means that evidence of female-female sexuality is scant. Did all of the available women truly want to choose from the plethora of men inhabiting the island? Did some women turn away from the voracious males clamoring for sex towards companionship among women instead? Did women express same-sex or bisexual desire? These questions are not posed, even as "Sapphic love" emotional and sexual

¹⁷³ Such tolerance for visible homosexuality and community was present in prisons like Belén and Lecumberri, although to a lesser extent; see chapter 4 for more information. Pablo Piccato has advanced an argument that emphasized the role of violence and hierarchies of power in structuring men's homosexual interactions, both in prison and outside of it. See Piccato, "Such a Strong Need." Taking his assertion that practices, rather than separate histories of identities, be researched historically at face value (pg 101), the absence of commentaries by contemporary observers on sexual violence as an organizational principle and, instead, the abundance of evidence suggesting amicable relationships between straight inmates and homosexuals, suggests that the Islas Marías camp was rather different than the turn-of-the-century cases Piccato studied.

relationships between women occurred in prisons.¹⁷⁴ Same-sex desire between women does appear in *Los muros de agua*—between the *hombruna* Estrella and more effeminate Soledad—although again such relations are seen by Revueltas through a homophobic lens, but further evidence is needed to confirm this as more than a heterosexual man’s fantasy.

Despite these caveats, a variety of information remains about the daily lives homosexuals led, much of which did not revolve around sex. Homosexuals served important functions in the colony, both socially and in terms of the labors they completed. They also strove to articulate their own personas, as individuals and as groups, through a variety of means. The final section thus sheds light on what daily life was for these men in their tropical home.

III. A “Paradise” of Afeminados: Daily Lives

On his tour of María Madre, journalist Miguel Gil described the various types of inhabitants on the island. Of these, one of the “classic” and “typical” inhabitants was the effeminate homosexual. As Gil sat conversing with some men and watching the sharks that prowled the island’s waters devour each other—the biggest eating the smallest—he heard a voice in which he noted a “special tone.” The high-pitched voice belonged to Leyva, an *afeminado* who, dressed in an apron, had arrived to serve coffee and to offer up the latest gossip, to the delight of the men present. Leyva enthusiastically and dramatically told the men a story about two hundred scorpions, the size of a frog, that devoured their mother. One even stung him. “God, what horrors!” he exclaimed. The men were tickled by the performance and Leyva’s manner of relating it; observed Gil,

We had a good laugh just from Leyva’s face, which imitated a little bunny; from his

¹⁷⁴ *Detectives* magazine, for example, ran a series on lesbianism in 1932; at least tangentially connecting lesbians to the islands, the article “Los Hijos de la Desvergüenza” transitioned from a discussion of lesbians in Lecumberri to male homosexuals in Islas Marías.

posture, the intonation of his voice, his outlandish lies, because he tells them so naturally, the ridiculousness of it all is funny.¹⁷⁵

At first glance, Gil could be read as mocking Leyva. Yet, a few lines later, Gil noted he and his companions passed an agreeable time together with Leyva as he spun his tall tales and that these “lies” were a welcome distraction from the harsher realities of the island, such as work in the Salinas mines, the isolation, and the very real prospect of death. Leyva is thus portrayed is like a loveable jester, an individual whom other men liked to make fun of but still wanted around, much like in the relationship between queer men and other inmates Martínez Ortega cited. Leyva’s campy performance was a means through which men could forget their troubles; he was a needed safety valve.

Thus, while Gil’s image of Leyva was not overly flattering, it was also not significantly judgmental and was more supportive than others made by contemporary observers, including Gil himself in other works. In fact, rather than calling him a sexual degenerate, Gil described Leyva’s gender identity in terms that today we might label as progressive and referencing transgendered identity: Leyva, according to Gil, was there because his “masculine figure did not accord with his manner of being.”¹⁷⁶ Leyva also had worthwhile, redeeming traits: he was a hard-worker, earning a little money for himself by “washing, ironing, and mending clothing.” Leyva was also an investor of sorts, using his money to buy hens, although his last purchase had cost him an extra year in prison due to the transaction being “crooked”.¹⁷⁷ Finally, Leyva was referred to—presumably—as the other men were: by his own name. While different, he was also a part of the community and retained a measure of respect, both from his fellow inmates and

¹⁷⁵ Gil, *La tumba del Pacífico*, vol. 2, 67-68. He tells other tall tales like a mother giving birth to twenty children in one day in the countryside.

¹⁷⁶ Gil, *La tumba del Pacífico*, vol. 2.

¹⁷⁷ Perhaps Leyva wanted to stay, and the transaction was intentional. Or perhaps he was caught up in an unintentional scandal that was used arbitrarily to sentence him to another year.

from an outside observer like Gil, even as the latter offered him to readers as one of the “types” found among the strange cast of characters living at the colony.¹⁷⁸

Although confronted with hardships and the ever-present threat of isolation and melancholy, many homosexual inmates like Leyva forged meaningful lives for themselves that included social circles, the development and deployment of identities, and the creation of relationships with other. Many homosexuals were among those who, in the relative freedom of the island prison, staked out a new community in exile and who found positions of prestige, rather than the abuse they had faced on the mainland. And, while having been relegated to the island for their homosexuality, homosexuals learned that the islands could serve as valuable space for self-expression that offered freedoms from harassment they may have not enjoyed in other locations, whether in another prison or in the city.

One means of establishing a persona was through names and nicknames. Some men chose names, like “Rosa” and “Luisa” that were common to women.¹⁷⁹ Some took names of famous actresses like “María Conesa” and “Mimí Derba”.¹⁸⁰ Others preferred to feminize masculine words. “La Rorra” took the term *rorro*, which colloquially meant “little man” and was something a boyfriend said to his girl—i.e., that he was her *rorro*—and changed into the feminized *rorra*, making him the “little gal” of a man. Still others chose animal names, like “La

¹⁷⁸ One more point about Leyva’s story. Leyva entered the conversation by contesting that large sharks ate smaller ones and then stated that small scorpions ate larger ones. This may have been an example of Gil marking him as an “other”—i.e., as an invert or someone who saw the world in inverted ways. However, it could have also been a way that Leyva was exerting a small measure of personal resistance, a moment in which the little guys triumphed over those larger than them. In other words, a comment on himself and others like him, other *afeminados*, succeeding against their challenges.

¹⁷⁹ Martínez Ortega, *La Isla*, 20.

¹⁸⁰ Navarrete, S. J., *En las Islas Mariás*, 71-72. A “Mimí Derba” was in Lecumberri prison in Mexico City in 1933 when Miguel Gil interviewed *afeminados* there in 1933. It is possible that this was the same man; if so, he had been incarcerated again or returned there from a stint at the penal colony while Navarrete was there in 1929. Of course, given the popularity of Derba the actress, its possible that this was someone else.

Lupana” (the she-wolf) and “La Lagartija (the she-lizard).¹⁸¹ The latter was a play on words—*lagartijo* was a derogatory term for a Mexican dandy of dubious heterosexuality; by feminizing it, La Lagartija showed that she had style and an ironic personality.¹⁸²

Another man, Roberto Hernández Alexander “El Raffles” or “El Rafles”—a nickname which seems to originate in English—was described as a “roguish” man around which “are told many anecdotes about his aversion to the handsome sex,” i.e., women. El Raffles ran a store and *fonda* (restaurant)—the originally named “Tres Marias”—and he also took photographs and taught English classes to colony employees. Palma described him as appropriately submissive to those with whom he sought to curry favor—such as the Director of the colony—but a “despot and haughty man” with his employees.¹⁸³ Such favor was needed for his commerce, and El Raffles, and like a few other fortunate prisoners, were allowed their own small businesses, which were open in the evenings or managed by others while the inmates worked on the island.¹⁸⁴

El Raffles’ restaurant served as a place where inmates would meet to drink coffee and talk about their days after work; it also functioned as “bazaar” for the goods that El Raffles obtained illegally and sold.¹⁸⁵ The story of El Raffles is another example of the opportunities open to homosexuals on the islands—as well as a corrective to an overly dramatic picture of their victimhood; he did, after all, make the most of his condition to emerge as an entrepreneur and community leader of sorts. Importantly, El Raffles is not described as a feminine homosexual, nor is his name feminine. He was instead seen as ambitious and roguish, qualities associated

¹⁸¹ Martínez Ortega, *La Isla*, 20.

¹⁸² Moisés González Navarro, *Historia moderna de México, vol. IV, La vida social* (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Hermes, 1957), 408. See also Victor Macías-González’s “The *Lagartijo* at the *High Life*: Masculine Consumption, Race, Nation, and Homosexuality in Porfirian Mexico,” in *The Famous 41: Sexuality and Social Control in Mexico, 1901* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003).

¹⁸³ Palma, *La verdad sobre las Islas Marias*, 111-112.

¹⁸⁴ Villarreal V., “Breve informe sobre la colonia penal,” 54.

¹⁸⁵ Palma, *La verdad sobre las Islas Marias*, 111-112. See also Bojórquez, 79.

more stereotypically with men. Although calling him a hypocrite, Palma also referenced qualities that other inmates, queer or otherwise, may have admired. El Raffles may have been an outlier—i.e., one of the few more masculine-identified queer men on the island—or representative of others who did not fit the stereotype of the effeminate male homosexual.¹⁸⁶

Whether masculine or feminine in outward appearance, fashion and mannerisms were means of self-expression at the colony. In 1927 *afeminados* “cursed the tyranny that obligated them to use men’s clothing, so inappropriate to their condition,” and in defiance painted their eyes and lips with makeup.¹⁸⁷ By the time of Múgica’s administration, the men could dress and act more provocatively. “What an extensive range!” Martínez Ortega exclaimed:

‘La Rorra,’ self-assured, always well-dressed, always wooed [by men].
La ‘Santa’, disparaging, with his beautiful eyes, his innate distinction, his cadenced walking...
‘Flor de Loto’ (lotus flower), that extraordinary man for his figure and his elegance...
La ‘Ramona’, a truly grotesque one, pretending to always have clearly feminine illnesses.

Each of the four are listed as effeminate in bearing, and all had certain affectations that either made them attractive to other inmates or reinforced their position as replacements for the absent women on the island. Some *afeminados* like them had even protested, when rounded up, that they were women who deserved better treatment.¹⁸⁸ With such beauty and elegance—and the interest inmates offered—it is not surprising that women viewed homosexuals as “true rivals.”¹⁸⁹

On the surface, these feminine behaviors, names, and fashion styles support ideas of a gendered division of sexuality, i.e., that some *afeminados* played the “feminine/passive” role to the other inmates “masculine/active” role, at least in attracting male attention in public.

¹⁸⁶ Palma calls him a *picaro*, which while retaining qualities of a “rascal” also was a type of lower-class hero who survived by his wits in a hostile or corrupt society. It is then a potentially unintended compliment, and the use of the terms offers evidence that El Raffles may have been admired. Bojórquez calls him *picaresco*.

¹⁸⁷ Navarrete, S. J., *En las Islas Marias*, 71.

¹⁸⁸ “Detenidos,” 6.

¹⁸⁹ Martínez Ortega, *La Isla*, 21.

However, reading such roles as representative of all, or even most, of the homosexual relationships on the island risks the assumption that such gender performances reify the effeminate homosexual as the *only* or most representative homosexual type, thereby reinforcing the biases expressed by the external observers about what homosexuality was. This is especially true since *afeminado* and *invertido* were also applied to dandified men in the period who did not dress in women's clothing, but wore the fashions of modern, urban environments.¹⁹⁰ El Raffles, obviously provides a counter example. Moreover, it cannot be assumed that all *afeminados*, regardless of their gender performances, would have necessarily played the "woman's role" in relationships, sexual or otherwise. As the story of the tattooed boxer shows, an *afeminado* could be the more dominant partner in a pair, and many *afeminados* actively sought out other males for sex and companionship, rather than waiting on others to approach them.

In daily life, homosexuals served many roles on the island. Some were performers and musicians, such as during the Sunday gatherings.¹⁹¹ These same events proved to be important locations for homosexuals in the audience to expand their social network with the other inmates.¹⁹² During the week, many worked in domestic duties, from housekeeping and cleaning to food service. Homosexuals performed similar jobs at Islas Mariás as they did in other prisons, and many of the positions were allocated on the basis of their supposed (or performed) effeminacy; thus they plied their skills in domestic chores associated with women. Martínez Ortega employed La Mariposa, and he was in charge of housecleaning and ironing for her. He also "sewed with a special expertise."¹⁹³ Ironically, these tasks were those that would mark men in mainstream society as deviant. In the confines of the prison, authorities were willing to

¹⁹⁰ Los Contemporáneos, a group of writers, artists, and philosophers are a prime example, as many were homosexual men who did not dress as women; see the next chapter.

¹⁹¹ "Los hijos de la desvergüenza," 13.

¹⁹² Martínez Ortega, *La Isla*, 20.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 86.

indulge male effeminacy if it suited their aims, thereby permitting the very behaviors that were prejudicial on the outside. How could true “rehabilitation” occur in such circumstances?

Since many homosexuals worked in the kitchens, these served as sites of socialization with other inmates, whether they were homosexuals or “regular” inmates. As early as 1927, *afeminados* worked serving food.¹⁹⁴ Martín Luis Guzmán described a kitchen scene during Múgica’s administration in his historical novel *Islas Mariás*. The kitchen was like a “corral”, where a shed housed a tortilla machine, a stove to cook them, and pot storage. “Seven or eight *invertidos* attend to it under the supervision of a superior, who is as grimy and filthy as they are,” he wrote. When workers from the salt mines arrived for dinner, “they see, on the table...a mountain of tortillas, a cauldron of beans, and another of coffee. Three *afeminados*, tireless in their swishing and caresses, take [from the table] to serve the line that passed in front. One gives the tortillas (five per person), another the beans, and another the coffee.”¹⁹⁵ It is hard not to imagine that such interactions—particularly after the men returned from brutal work—were not seen as a welcome change of pace by the other prisoners or that the *afeminados* would not themselves become sights for sore eyes and desirable, given the attention they lavished on the men. Indeed, over the cauldron of beans or pots of coffee, friendships and romantic interests could be cultivated along side at least elements of actual respect.

After a day of work and dinner, when prisoners walked in ranks towards their barracks, the time “when they began to live.”¹⁹⁶ Since the colony lacked sufficient guards to supervise the inmates in the off hours, prisoners organized their own experiences. “The passions, the fights, the

¹⁹⁴ Navarrete, S. J., *En las Islas Mariás*, 71.

¹⁹⁵ Martín Luis Guzmán, *Islas Mariás* (Mexico, D.F.: Compañía General de Ediciones, 1959), 71-72.

¹⁹⁶ Martínez Ortega, *La Isla*, 30.

tragedies, incubated in the nights in the barracks,” Martínez Ortega wrote.¹⁹⁷ The kitchens also served as social sites between homosexuals and other inmates after work, as many homosexuals congregated there to enjoy each others’ company. La Mariposa frequented these informal soirees, “excessively painted” with makeup, “mingling with other homosexuals who provided their services in the adjoining houses.”¹⁹⁸ Homosexuals, who met prospective lovers during the day, would suggest a later meeting, then return at night to initiate liaisons.

In essence, an entire community existed in which homosexuals had positions of status, their own social circles, and larger community roles, as well as were desirable partners for relationships and sex.¹⁹⁹ As this brief section shows, queer men could carve out a meaningful life for themselves. They also exhibited traits that should be read as part of their adoption or acceptance of an identity, insofar as the men projected personas, adopted names, and utilized style—from elegant to grotesque or roguish—to define themselves. In other words, the men had, in large part, a sense of self, as well as a sense of community and had recapitulated the definition of their “type” in a more affirming manner.

Conclusion: Afeminados, Citizens, and Identity

We now return to the story of La Mariposa that opened this chapter. In telling his story to Martínez Ortega, he challenged the grounds on which he had been incarcerated and the rubrics under which he had been condemned, contesting the criminality of being himself. La Mariposa, the aptly named “Butterfly” of the “Butterfly Islands,” distinguished his “crime” from those of a murderer and a robber with whom he kept Martínez Ortega company while she convalesced after

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 86.

¹⁹⁹ A caveat may be in order. As mentioned earlier, Revueltas notes in his novel about the penal colony that two homosexuals had fled together into the mountain. Search crews ultimately found their decomposing bodies there. This reference suggests that there may have been some homosexuals who faced persecution and for whom the Islas Marías was not the “paradise” it was for others.

a strong case of malaria. After hearing the sordid tales of his companions—one who had murdered the son of a business rival, the other who had committed numerous acts of robbery—La Mariposa told the men that, “You...are here for something that warrants the penalty, but I...never have robbed, I have never killed, I have never taken drugs...God is my witness that only because of my flaw...” He trailed off at the end, but the implication was clear: he was not like the other men, incarcerated due to a “flaw” rather than criminal behaviors and punished for an essential aspect of his character, despite being an otherwise law-abiding citizen.

La Mariposa’s self-defense exhibits an identity; by being incarcerated as a member of a collectivity with other innocent homosexuals, his self-awareness—which may have existed in some earlier form—solidified. As he told Martínez Ortega, “When I am released and you are in Mexico, I hope you can give me work in your house; because, I may be whatever I may be, but no one beats me when it comes to honesty.” Perhaps this experience is what impressed Martínez Ortega to state that the presence of homosexuals in the colony was “always unjustified.”²⁰⁰ Her sympathetic opinion contrasted with her criticism of the sexual “madness” affecting other men; the men’s passions were abnormal, not the homosexuals who were “that way” without volition.

If the penal colony’s goal was to rehabilitate *afeminados* into heterosexual “real men,” then that goal failed. The arbitrary roundups often netted the same individuals, resulting in the men being returned to the colony and its community. Exile—more specifically, the physical deterritorialization of the visible homosexual minority—and not rehabilitation was revealed as the true goal or, at least, the outcome of the flawed execution of the social engineering program.²⁰¹ Furthermore, the islands—in their capacity as a space in which the proverbial

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 19.

²⁰¹ As Martínez Ortega observed, “the sending of prisoners in mass, without studying each case carefully, does not make but retards the rehabilitation of those that maybe could be rehabilitated in life.” Ibid., 42.

“closet” was largely absent—actually fostered the very behaviors that they were meant to counter. This is why the “sexual problem” remained a grave concern and intractable issue. Men like La Mariposa would return to the capital, carrying new experiences of identity, relationships (sexual or emotional) and queer socialization with them, as well as links to networks of like-minded individuals forged through their experiences. The homosexual as a delinquent type became a self-fulfilling prophecy: through relegation, authorities unwittingly provided support for the formation of identities, behaviors, and communities that incorporated sexuality as a key component. By trying to highlight the problem of the urban homosexual, authorities helped to create him through their attempts at negating the type. And, due to the long sentences that accompanied relegation to the Islas Mariás colony, men had a longer time to craft themselves *as* the “classic” types experienced by Gil, to distill previous inclinations into community structures, and to socialize others into their queer world. The colony’s history, then, reveals how top-down state policies—common throughout Latin America during this period—clashed with much more powerful civil society trends, ultimately being undermined and renegotiated by those trends.

Understanding the Islas Mariás case study is key to understanding homosexuality in Mexico City and Mexico itself because the colony served as an extension of federal power; crimes committed in the capital, which was federal territory, were crimes committed against the nation. Exile thus served both practical and symbolic functions for the nation. The study also offers an opportunity to see the genealogy of later critiques that effectively tied homosexual rights to more universal forms of democracy. The emerging self-awareness and collective identity Mexican homosexuals expressed at the colony emboldened some to claim their citizenship rights. And they would earn allies like Martínez Ortega (who felt she was

“imprisoned” on the island too) in their struggles in succeeding years.²⁰²

In a social environment in which sexual disparity limited options, some prejudices were reconsidered. Even as some inmates, such as Navarrete and Revueltas, remained homophobic, others at the colony were struck by the humanity of homosexuals and the inherent inequality of their treatment by the Mexican judicial system and society. Some of the “real” men may themselves have returned from exile with more complicated understandings of sexual diversity than those only exposed to press stereotypes. Thus, the men’s relationships cannot be dismissed as insignificant, and instead, must be contextualized within the history of homosexual experience and within Mexican history itself. The seeds of homophile organizing, militant identities, and public queer identities were sown in the social experiments conducted by the Mexican government in its penal system. These seeds, like others planted during later student protests, reform movements, political activism, and daily queer life, would alter the Mexican socio-cultural and political landscapes in following decades.

In writing one of his important and insightful pieces on homosexuality in Mexico, Carlos Monsiváis cited Martínez Ortega’s work.²⁰³ Yet, he painted a wholly negative picture of the experiences of homosexuals between 1901 and the 1970s, despite the contrary evidence in her book. Such an argument may bolster claims of homophobic repression—and such claims have much evidence to support them—but it also obfuscates the very real ways in which homosexuals contested their marginalization and sought to live fulfilling lives, despite the challenges facing them. The stories in this chapter—these lives—are important, because they are windows into experiences silenced by both homophobic repression and well-meaning, and completely

²⁰² She was not alone—throughout the century, individuals would step forward and question the punishments inflicted upon homosexuals. I detail these in subsequent chapters.

²⁰³ Carlos Monsiváis, “Los espacios marginales,” in *Que se abra esa puerta: Crónicas y ensayos sobre la diversidad sexual* (Mexico, D.F.: Paidós, 2010), 252-253. Originally published in 1998. As always, I am indebted to Monsiváis for the sources he mentions and his pioneering work.

understandable, ideas of victimhood expressed by homosexual activists today. But as the case of the Islas Marías shows, more opportunities existed than has been previously described—thereby giving us new insights into Mexican history and homosexual experience—and the positive implications of these opportunities that would bear fruit both inside and outside the prison.

Section II Postscript: There and Back Again in the Tomb of the Pacific, 1940-1960

The next two chapters focus on the period of the 1940s and 1950s and the ways in which citizenship, homosexuality, nation, and the transnational converged in ways like never before. As in earlier periods, though, homosexuals continued being sent to the island colony. While my source base on the period is much smaller than that which informed the chapter above, a few examples are interesting to mention that can serve as a bridge between this chapter and the next. In February 1945, prisoners sentenced for “sexual inversion” were among those on their way to the colony.²⁰⁴ Periodicals in the period continued viewing the colony as the legitimate space to exile homosexuals. *Nota roja* rags like *Magazine de Policía* and its *Suplemento* as well urged relegation. For example, in their “City Chips” (*Lascas de la ciudad*) section, the magazine ran a photo of “La Carioca” and “La Charra,” two *equivocados* detained in a roundup in spring 1948. “For these a little time in the Islas Marías would be ideal,” mused *Magazine de Policía*.²⁰⁵ Like the 1930s reformers and journalists described above, the magazine argued that the penal colony would teach the men to work and that “exercise would return these *anormales*, who so task authorities, into their right minds.”

Both La Carioca and La Charra wear hats in their photo. La Charra’s is a sombrero, and he is dressed like a traditional Mexican cowboy, a *charro*; his name was a feminized form of the term. La Carioca, in contrast, wore a dark-colored suit with a hat similar to a boater. Like the *Jueves de Excelsior* image in January 1941, the photo showed the spectrum of Mexican masculinity, from dandy *afeminado* to cowboy; the difference was that in the photo, the cowboy himself was allegedly queer.²⁰⁶ He was, then, another “Raffles,” only with a feminine name.

²⁰⁴ “Una cuerda a Islas Marías,” *El Universal*, February 10, 1945, sec. 2, 16.

²⁰⁵ “Lascas de la ciudad,” *Magazine de Policía*, April 5, 1948, 5. *Tiempecito* is the term used by the magazine.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

The roundup netting the men occurred at the same time as efforts to close businesses near the Alameda that catered to sexual commerce.²⁰⁷ Three days after the photo of La Carioca and La Charra appeared in *Magazine de Policía*, one appeared of seven *degenerados* dressed in women's clothing for a dance in *Suplemento de Policía*. Upon seeing them,

the police threw down the gauntlet and they were remitted to the el Carmen jail where they were shaved in a pitiless manner. Goodbye beautiful hairstyles and goodbye tresses... What meat for the Islas Marías!²⁰⁸

The ritualized shaving of the men's heads—and its glorification in the mocking tone of *Suplemento de Policía*—served a dual function. On one hand, it masculinized the men, removing hairstyles that were part of their *afeminado* identity. Paradoxically, it also emasculated the men, denying their volition and individualism, much like is accomplished when hair is cut upon entering military service. It was, then, a means of breaking the men of both their claims to be feminine and any claims they might try to make to assert their masculinity. Such tactics would become a staple of police roundups thereafter; by the time of the student movement in the 1960s, the longer hairstyles of young men (most of whom were not homosexual) became targets.²⁰⁹ *Magazine de Policía*'s stance was clear: homosexuals needed to be removed from society because cross-dressing homosexuals were “drug addicts and reptiles that should be in the islands and not even there, because their presence would be harmful.” One author thus called on authorities “to create an *aislamiento* (isolated prison) for this ‘category’ of immoral units.”²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ “Mal negocio para los hoteleros por las 'razzias',” *Excelsior*, April 1, 1948, sec. 2, 7.

²⁰⁸ Casco (photographs) and Marcelo (text), “Lascas ciudadinas,” *Suplemento de Policía*, April 8, 1948, 14. In the caption, the term *raptados* is used, rather than *rapados*. This word generally means “kidnapped;” given the photograph of the men with their heads shaved, as well as the goodbyes to their tresses, it's most likely that this is a typo. It's an interesting mistake, though, as the men in a certain way were indeed “kidnapped” away from the city.

²⁰⁹ Political cartoons in the 1960s would depict young men having their hair cut as part of the government's crackdown against students. See the analysis of several provided in Elaine Carey, “Los Dueños de México: Power and Masculinity in '68,” in *Gender and Sexuality in 1968: Transformative Politics in the Cultural Imagination*, ed. Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 59-84.

²¹⁰ Sergio Fernández, “El descaro de los sodomitas,” *Suplemento de Policía*, March 25, 1948, 8.

However there was debate on whether the colony remained valuable. A column in February 1948 in *El Universal*, criminologist Luis Garrido asserted that ninety percent of those sent to the penal colony returned to a life of crime, which was not remotely worth the expense of running it. Men were more productive, could learn skills, and could work legitimately if they remained in the capital's prison than they could at the less-equipped facilities in the colony. Moreover, sending women to the colony converted them to prostitutes, so they should not be sent, nor should invalids, those suffering from tuberculosis, and homosexuals. More importantly, relegation did not fit the penal guidelines, nor did it achieve national development.

In addition, the same problems that plagued the colony before—notably the “sexual problem”—continued to occur. In 1954, further women were banned from being sent to the colony, a act that only exacerbated the “sexual problem;” in fact, according to Adalberto Meléndez R., the colony's administrator beginning in 1951, this ban was the reason why the most violent crimes in the colony's history occurred thereafter. An interesting correlation is that the numbers of “official” homosexuals grew throughout the period. In 1954, according to Meléndez, there were 19 homosexuals officially recorded at the colony; in 1956, there were 31 and in 1958 there were 42.²¹¹ This rise, apparently, was in part due to prisoner actions: “all of these were converted the good or the bad way. The toughest, meanest [prisoners], those who aren't loved or respected by anybody, [were] in charge of this funny task.” What is more, Meléndez noted that he had heard gossip of authorities who thought that women were considered unnecessary at the Colony. “As a theory, this hypothesis may be wonderful, but in practice, it is inadmissible, criminal,” Meléndez retorted, particularly given that conjugal visits were

²¹¹ Adalberto Meléndez R., *Las Islas Mariás: cárcel sin rejas* (Mexico: Editorial Jus, 1960), 188-189.

considered the norm in other prisons.²¹² “To impede the conjugal visit in these prisons would be stupid,” he concluded.

If part of the reason for the ban on women was based such perspectives, then it meant that Mexico had abandoned ideas of rehabilitation and instead, put homosexuals in a more dangerous situation than they had been previously—among men not only isolated from the mainland, but by law isolated from women. In October 1955, an article in *Criminalia* would urge the same “solutions” as in the 1930s—organized work, spiritual and moral practices, sports, and good food—to combat this recurrent problem.²¹³ The sexual problem, though, would remain unresolved at the Tomb of the Pacific.

One final note: during the 1940s and 1950s, which the next section labels as the “golden age” of the *ambiente* in Mexico City, roundups and violence against homosexuals would also increase. Inmates returning from the colony found both a more visible homosexual social world and new threats that fed off that world. One case discussed by *Suplemento de Policía* was that of a waiter at a Colonia Guerrero cabaret. The waiter lived *en amasiato*—note that it was not *hacen vida marital*—with another man who demanded of him fifteen pesos as a daily “gift.” “Woe to him,” reported the magazine, “if he did not dutifully attend to this obligation, because the ogre would hound him and start a fight to the death, where the knife and nail clippers would come out, and even the small and large vases of the place where they live.”²¹⁴ This domestic fight was but

²¹² Ibid., 189.

²¹³ Heraclio Rodríguez, “La colonia penal de las Islas Marias como base de un sistema de readaptación de los delincuentes,” *Criminalia* 21 (Fall 1955): 468. As of the start of October 1955, 937 men and 27 women were at the tomb of the Pacific. Presumably, the remaining women were those already incarcerated at the time of the ban. The preferred idea was also “old” like the “problem” it sought to address: give men the monetary means, in compensation for their work harnessing the island’s riches, to bring their wives or “concubines” to the island with them during their relegation. Perhaps it was optimism that kept reformers along this line of reasoning, or perhaps it was a lack of vision and of being able to see alternatives. Rather than engaging with homosexuality or the actual needs of interests of men on a meaningful way, the article rehashed old ideas that required both support and resources that did not exist

²¹⁴ Fernández, “El descaro de los sodomitas,” 9.

one of the many battles during the 1940s and 1950s that involved homosexuality. Not all would be as violent. Yet, as homosexuals became more visible, more comfortable as a type, more organized in their social sphere, battles were inevitable, and they would crisscross society at all levels—from the home to the street to the public sphere—as Mexicans sought to forge a nation in an increasingly transnational world. Homosexuality would be at the core of this process.

Section III Introduction: Homosexual Panics, Citizenship, and the *Ambiente*'s "Golden Age," 1940-1960

On the cover of the April 21, 1947 edition of *Magazine de Policía*, two young men posed for the camera.¹ Arms crossed, wearing makeup and feminine clothing, they stared back at the reader, half-smiling, half-smirking, under the headline "Cabaret de Homosexuales". The two *afeminados* were patrons of El Dragón de Oro (Golden Dragon), a bar located in Tepito, a seedy *barrio* in Colonia Morelos in Mexico City.² According to the accompanying article, the bar was a favorite meeting spot for the "third sex."³ Given the confidence of the two appearing on the magazine's cover, one can imagine hearing the retort "¿Y qué?" (So?) to the readers' gaze, whom the editors of *Magazine de Policía* and the article's author Paulino Ek assumed would be both intrigued and scandalized by these patrons of El Dragón de Oro.

The article was but one of many that offered mainstream Mexican society a glimpse of the queer social world. It showed the failure of attempts to eliminate homosexuals from the capital through imprisonment and relegation, as well as a continued fascination in the tabloid press with sexual "perversity." And, it illustrated how homosexual men were becoming even more visible than before, more confident in their identities and social spaces, and even more resilient in their rejection of heteronormativity.

In Section II, I demonstrated how between the 1920s and 1940s, a multi-sited, archipelagic social world had begun to develop in the capital; the same could be said about other Mexican cities, particularly Guadalajara, Veracruz, Monterrey, Morelia, and Cuernavaca. By the

¹ *Magazine de Policía* was a prominent example of the "security press" tabloids that circulated during the 1940s. It was published weekly on Mondays. In addition, *Suplemento de Policía*, the magazine's supplement, was published weekly on Thursdays. Some of the same writers and photographers who had worked as part of the magazine *Detectives*' staff in the 1930s transitioned to *Magazine de Policía*, resulting in a measure of continuity between the interest in and portrayal of homosexuality in its pages.

² Colonia Morelos is just north of the historic center and adjacent to the neighborhood in which Lecumberri prison was found.

³ Paulino Ek, "Cabaret de homosexuales," *Magazine de Policía*, April 21, 1947. The claim highlighted how the third sex continued to be constructed through the transnational.

1930s, *afeminados*, *invertidos*, and other homosexuals became increasingly visible to mainstream observers. This process intensified in the 1940s and 1950s, a twenty-year period that could be called the “golden age” of Mexican homosexual culture. Rather than hiding in the shadows, queer men sought each other out in neighborhoods—from middle-class areas like Colonia Roma to working-class areas like Tepito—and openly participated in the capital’s social circles, both in the *ambiente* and in mainstream society. Homosexuals could be found not only in cruising sites such as the Alameda park or along busy streets like the Avenida Madero, but also in a variety of bars, cabarets, and other nightlife establishments. Many of these catered specifically to queer clientele or at least encouraged a diverse mix of patrons including bohemian artists and writers, “modern” women, and other free-spirited folk, in addition to those seeking same-sex interactions. Wealthy men and those seeking the “authentic” Mexican experience continued to search for it in the seedy cantinas and cabarets of the Plaza Garibaldi. They slumped in working-class dives in Colonia Obrera, looking for that “real” man who just happened to want to interact amorously. In turn, working-class men frequented queer-friendly bars nestled between their places of work, the impromptu food stalls lining many streets, and the tenements found in the capital’s central neighborhoods.

Yet, this vibrant homosexual social archipelago has largely been forgotten. Simply put, the state and cultural authorities were more unified and powerful in the 1940s and 1950s than before; their raids against homosexual social sites, residences, and meeting points became stronger. Instead of a handful of men rounded up as part of campaigns to “clean-up” the city, dozens would be targeted in longer-term raids. Following World War II, these roundups would intensify, revealing the full extent of the *ambiente* and the ways it overlapped with mainstream society. Always a cipher for anti-Mexican concerns, the homosexual would become regarded as

even more dangerous, a threat not only to the country's continued development during the "Mexican Miracle"—a "golden age" of economic prosperity in part built on new industry and the expansion of tourism—but also to the nation's integrity in a world divided by the Cold War.

That the forgotten homosexual golden age corresponded to that of Mexico itself is both ironic and also not surprising given the new opportunities for working and living that appeared in the period. Yet, as homosexuals became more visible, Mexico was simultaneously entering a more conservative period of politics and culture. In 1940, Manuel Ávila Camacho began his *sexenio* on a wave of political change that had begun in 1938 towards the end of Cárdenas's term.⁴ Over the next twelve years, starting with his term and accelerating with that of Miguel Alemán, a "counterrevolution" was institutionalized in which the social reforms made by the post-revolutionary leaders through Cárdenas were undermined. Similarly, the social, cultural, and political pluralities, however contested, afforded by the Revolution and its aftermath were revised in favor of "national unity" as represented by the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) in politics. If the aftermath of the Revolution involved attempts by competing parties to define what *lo mexicano* was during the 1920s and 1930s, then the period between 1940 and 1960 saw the intensification and amplification of state efforts to enshrine the approved vision of *mexicanidad*, one that privileged patriarchal norms and excluded queer men as emblems of a failed modernity, much like it marginalized other groups (such as feminist women, communists, students, and workers) who dissented. This was a pyrrhic triumph, however, as disconnects between media representations of the "everyman"—whether outfitted in *charro*-style clothing or

⁴ On the shift towards conservatism under Avila Camacho, which many regarded at the time as "moderate", see Stephen R. Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1999). Olcott has argued that Cardenismo was a "Janus-faced enterprise" and that by the time of Avila Camacho's election, the women's movement, which had seen such promise in Cárdenas's *sexenio*, had been defeated and retreated as the state co-opted popular organizing and began anti-communist purges. See Jocelyn Olcott, *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 232-244.

the latest fashions—and the actual consolidation of power and wealth into an authoritarian oligarchic state became more apparent.

Mexico's conservative turn was prefigured in the debates on homosexuality and the treatment of homosexuals in the post-revolutionary period; by the 1940s, the alternative visions of modernity of which the Contemporáneos were emblematic, had lost overt political cachet (even if they retained influence on Mexican letters and philosophy.) Whereas descriptions of queer men had never been made in a flattering way prior to 1940, by the time of Ávila Camacho's election and in the decades following, much of the rhetoric used against such men—and the way they were portrayed—became even more critical, sensational, negative, and even hateful. Homosexuals were often visible others who could be labeled as anti-Mexican, harassed, and discriminated against. This process, marked by repeated assaults on the *ambiente*, reached a fevered pitch by September 1959 when both the state and public sphere used the gruesome murder of millionaire Mercedes Casasola and her bisexual lover Ycillio as justification to effect mass roundups of homosexuals on a scale previously unseen. What is more, these roundups were complemented by and overlapped with those targeting undesirable foreign residents, and as a result, homosexuals and certain groups of immigrants were linked together in a wave of homophobic, xenophobic panic that sought to make Mexico “safe” for its own citizens and the “right” kind of foreign visitors: wealthy tourists.

During this period, homosexuals were regarded not only as threats to youth and the body politic, but they were also blamed for violence directed at *ambiente* communities more than ever before. This meant that when a victim was discovered who happened to be homosexual, police assumed that the individual had been killed, beaten, or abused not because of homophobic intolerance, but by other sexual deviants who, by virtue of their homosexuality, were predisposed

to passionate criminality. Or when a case remained unsolved, as the Casasola case did for some time, homosexuals would bear the brunt of judicial aggression as “natural” and “passionate” criminals whose crimes occurred under mysterious circumstances. Across the discursive spectrum, from cultural texts to press reports and treatises by medical jurists, homosexuals were marked as abnormal, dangerous, and culpable for vice, despite ample evidence to the contrary.

A few differences did mark this period from the immediate post-revolutionary period. First, Mexican state institutions grew more powerful and more able to expend resources against homosexual men. This was in part due to the solidification of power in the hands of an oligarchic, authoritarian elite that cultivated broad-based political alliances.⁵ Post-Cárdenist homophobia blended scientific dogmas, Catholicism, and beliefs from across the political spectrum as part of the PRI’s autocratic ideologies, particularly as these intersected with nationalist impulses in an ever-increasing transnational age.

Second, increasing foreign investment and tourism brought to a head a central tension that had long festered in Mexican politics between desires to have autochthonous identities and institutions and desires for the transnational. Investment and tourism were double-edged swords that were simultaneously necessary because they provided the funds to build national institutions and threatening because they inundated the nation with an influx of foreign goods, people, and ideas that could “contaminate” the national project. While such fears had circulated for decades, the publishing of *Sodoma pide fuero* (1959) marked the moment when homophobia, nationalism, and Mexico’s emerging “third-way” politics—in which it sought to be a leader of the Third World—converged. The text blended armchair psychology, pop science, pseudo-Catholic

⁵ See for example the descriptions of cross-class coalitions during the Ávila Camacho presidency built upon the development of social insurance as a bargain between labor and the state. Michelle Dion, “The Political Origins of Social Security in Mexico during the Cárdenas and Ávila Camacho Administrations,” *Mexican Studies / Estudios Mexicanos* 21, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 59-95.

dogma, anti-imperialist rhetoric, and homophobic diatribes to assert Mexico's morality and national maturity against the superpower to the north. Because the United States "tolerated" homosexuality, it was not fit to lead the world as it claimed the right to do.⁶

Third, despite texts produced by middle-class authors like Samuel Ramos and Octavio Paz that located both "authentic" Mexican identity and the nation's "justified" homophobia in the working-classes, the *ambiente* was shaped as much by the working- and lower-middle classes as it was by elites. Their impact has almost entirely been forgotten, but it was the working-class *ambiente* that had the most "tentacles" stretching across Mexico City, forming an increasingly visible archipelago of homosexual interaction. During the 1940s and 1950s, new establishments catering to the *ambiente* increased significantly. Private parties continued, including the elaborate drag balls and soirees hosted by wealthy individuals, but they were eclipsed by the social gatherings in working-class neighborhoods. Many of these neighborhoods had been or were near the former zones of tolerance, and practices of "slumming" by wealthier men-on-the-make continued. More important, though, were the roles that the local businesses played in the neighborhoods themselves, offering spaces between work and home where gender and sexuality proved flexible. Enterprising homosexuals found opportunities here, and the net result was that instead of a prominent "gay ghetto" located in one area of the city, the capital was marked by numerous sites of homosexual interaction and a more organized community than ever before. Fourth, while the convergence of increasing state power and the rise of the *ambiente* as a more cohesive social world would result in explosive clashes between 1940 and 1960, homosexuals began asserting that they were true Mexican citizens and deserving of rights on a wider scale. In

⁶ Francisco Ferrer Torrents and Joan D'Oc, *Sodoma pide fuero* (Mexico, D.F.: Editor F. Ferrer, 1959). Ironically, as the text criticized the US as a decadent nation of "twenty million homosexuals," the United States had itself been in the throws of anti-communist and anti-homosexual panics during the 1950s. See David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

addition, the seeds sown in the post-revolutionary period by sympathetic individuals such as Narciso Bassols and Judith Martínez Ortega continued to grow among others in Mexican society, laying a foundation for the militancy of the 1960s and beyond. Efforts to treat homosexuality objectively would lead to questions being raised as to why it was regarded as so dangerous and how biases against it were as much based on dogmatic opinion as they were on actual evidence. In light of these differences, the next two chapters investigate the ongoing debates around homosexuality and citizenship in Mexico during the 1940s and 1950s and the emergence of the *ambiente*'s mid-century golden age. The rise of homosexual militancy in the decades that followed this period can be attributed in large part to a reaction against the attempts to exert political, juridical, and cultural authority against a homosexual social world that was ever more visible between 1940 and 1960.

Chapter 6 begins with the pseudo-psychological perspectives on Mexican identity penned by Octavio Paz in 1950 that built on the previous discussions of virile identity and citizenship. These perspectives—most notably Paz's thesis on the active/passive binary—distilled previous understandings of Mexican identity and would shape discourses on *lo mexicano* and Mexican sexuality, obfuscating the richer histories of both in academic and popular texts for decades. Moreover, Paz's vision of Mexican masculinity is shown by historical sources as only one masculinity among many and one in constant negotiation against alternative forms based on consumption and gender-bending as seen among the *exóticos* of Mexican-style wrestling. The third section explores the consequences of decades of medical and criminological debates that hinged on the tension over whether or not homosexuality was a congenital characteristic or something that was learned socially. Indeed, in the 1950s, a new, more drastic "cure" for homosexuality emerged: sex-reassignment surgery. Such surgery aimed to restore

heteronormative binaries upon which Mexican nationalism rested. Finally, I describe two representative cases from 1959, a year in which the national, local, and fears of the transnational converged with homosexuality in dramatic and very public ways that would help drive the period's surging authoritarianism.

In Chapter 7, I begin with the experiences of Tennessee Williams in the Mexican capital, which provide a window into the home life and devotional practices of homosexual prostitutes. I then examine case studies from the 1940s on the working-class bars La Lucha and El Dragón de Oro. Crucially, men at La Lucha would challenge being rounded-up with a legal case that made it to the Mexican Supreme Court. Later sections detail further roundups and the middle-class and elite *ambiente*, as well as how men of different social backgrounds met in working-class neighborhoods. Through all of the sections, I show the diversity and breadth of the *ambiente*, its resilience despite attempts to undermine it, the modes of survival that men enacted within it.

The period between 1940-1960 was crucial, then, not only because it solidified nationalist and homophobic rhetoric together—a process that had been underway since before the Revolution—but also because it marked the *ambiente*'s maturation. From this point on, homosexuals would be better connected locally, nationally, and internationally through shared experiences of repression and pleasure and through transnational webs of consumption. The stage was set for an active confrontation with a state that persisted in using homosexuals as foils.

A Brief Panorama of the Period

Between 1940 and 1960, the population of Mexico City would double, and the population of the Distrito Federal as a whole—which included many suburbs that would become part of the greater

city—nearly tripled.⁷ New roads connected the capital to other Mexican cities, as well as to the US.⁸ Over 10,000 kilometers of new roads were built between 1940 and 1950, linking the nation together as never before; with the roads came the telegraph and new bus services and rapid migration to the cities, thereby generating the unprecedented growth described above.⁹ Daily Pullman trains went from St. Louis, Missouri to Mexico City (48 hours).¹⁰ The capital was also connected to the nation and world through air travel.¹¹

The new roads, trains, and air routes brought an influx of foreigners interested in spending money as tourists. The Mexican government encouraged tourism as a lucrative means of generating wealth, as well as an opportunity to distill “authentic” Mexican culture and traditions for display to foreigners and Mexicans alike, particularly as the PRI’s authoritarianism increased. However, new infrastructure also allowed individuals that did not want the “official”

⁷ See Cuadro 4, between pages 52 and 53 in Moisés González Navarro, *Población y sociedad en México (1900-1970)* (Mexico, D.F.: UNAM, Facultad de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales, 1974). According to the 1940 census, 1,448,442 individuals lived in Mexico City, while 1,757,530 lived in the Distrito Federal in total. Many of the neighborhoods that today form part of the city and are found on the city’s sprawling Metro subway lines—such as Mixcoac and Tacubaya—were suburbs at the start of Ávila Camacho’s *sexenio*. The city was still one of clear skies and impressive vistas, with the volcanoes Popocatepetl and Itzaccihuatl rising to the east. Neither pollution nor traffic had yet overran the capital. The city’s population would jump to 2,234,795 and a total of 3,050,442 in the DF by 1950. By 1960, 2,832,133 lived in Mexico City, with a total of 4,870,876 living in the federal district. The period also was marked by a national shift from a predominately rural population to an “urban” one, although it is important to note that what was considered urban referred to towns outside of the major metropolitan centers.

⁸ In 1936, builders completed the first major highway from Laredo, Texas to Mexico City as part of the Pan-American Highway; at the same time, a “constellation of modern highways with Petróleos Mexicanos (PEMEX) gas stations” reached from the capital to tourist destinations like Acapulco, Guanajuato, Morelia, Oaxaca City, Taxco, and Veracruz. See Dina Berger and Andrew Grant Wood, “Introduction: Tourism Studies and the Tourism Dilemma,” in *Holiday in Mexico: Critical Reflections on Tourism and Tourist Encounters*, ed. Dina Berger and Andrew Grant Wood (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010), 7.

⁹ Wendy Waters, “Remapping Identities: Road Construction and Nation Building in Postrevolutionary Mexico,” in *The Eagle and the Virgin: National and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, ed. Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 224.

¹⁰ Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s*, 28.

¹¹ Air travel would increase in importance, particularly as competition intensified between domestic firms like Aeronaves Mexicanas and CMA (Mexicana) and international firms. On the growth of Mexican airlines and air travel see chapters 1-3 of R. E. G. Davies, *Airlines of Latin America since 1919* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1984). Ads for flights would dot newspapers in the period. For example, in *Novedades* on February 6, 1945, CMA offered flights connecting Monterrey and Chicago, while Braniff from the United States offered a number of routes in northern and eastern Mexico. Interest in airplanes was likely enhanced not only by a desire to travel and encourage tourism, but also by Mexico’s contribution to World War II in the fabled Escuadrón 201, whose photos would litter the press. See for example “Los mexicanos que van al frente,” *Novedades*, February 5, 1945, 2.

version of Mexican authenticity. Some teachers, former US American GIs, and foreign intellectuals who headed to Mexico City College brought new cultural practices and ideas with them and intermingled with Mexicans in “bohemian” sites throughout the capital and tourist zones, and potential vectors of ideologies that challenged the nationalist project.¹² This tension, between viewing foreigners as desired targets for the country’s burgeoning tourist industry and potential purveyors of subversive ideologies or behaviors that threatened Mexico’s moral health, would take on added significance as nationalism and homophobia converged fully by 1959.

Nevertheless, Mexico opened to foreigners and foreign ideas more than ever before. Foods like pancakes, packaged bread, soft-drinks, and packaged snacks and cereals swept the urban middle-classes.¹³ Foreign and domestic industry “modernized” Mexico, a project that along with creating a “stable industrial proletariat” was important to nationalist aims.¹⁴ State programs also targeted the working-classes and poor through nutrition programs and the construction of dining halls in *barrios* that served food deemed “healthy” and “modern.” The programs sought to develop these Mexicans into model workers and citizens to service national projects.¹⁵ Yet, even as Mexico used manufacturing as a means of achieving “social progress”

¹² One of the most notable examples of the period was William Burroughs, who embraced a vibrant homosexual subculture during his time in the capital in the early 1950s and killed his wife during a drunken game. On his homosexual experiences, see William S Burroughs, *Queer* (New York: Viking, 1985); William S Burroughs, *Junky* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977). The latter was published for the first time in 1953.

¹³ Jeffrey M Pilcher, “Mexico’s Pepsi Challenge: Traditional Cooking, Mass Consumption, and National Identity,” in *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, and Eric Zolov (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 80-81.

¹⁴ US American automobile companies invested heavily in the nation; while auto manufacturing had existed since the 1920s, it was in the 1950s and beyond that they would contribute to the transformation of urban centers. See Steven J. Bachelor, “Toiling for the ‘New Invaders’: Autoworkers, Transnational Corporations, and Working-Class Culture in Mexico City, 1955-1968,” in *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, and Eric Zolov (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 276.

¹⁵ See Sandra Aguilar Rodríguez, “Cooking Modernity: Nutrition Policies, Class, and Gender in 1940s and 1950s Mexico City,” *The Americas* 64, no. 2 (October 2007): 177-205.

and as the centerpiece of import-substitution industrialization, it also brought with it “Americanization” of Mexican workers that undermined attempts to solidify national identity.¹⁶

Combined with the influx of foreign ideas and peoples, the dramatic population shift—and the corresponding realities, many of them harsh, of living in urban conglomerations—allowed for an idealization of the rural past and the formation of the “authentic” *lo mexicano*, rather than an accurate representation of the often desperate realities that rural inhabitants had once faced. Such an image was bolstered by the images portrayed by actors in the Mexican cinema, where virtuous, honorable characters were juxtaposed against the “vices” and “perversity” of urban life, of which the drug addict, prostitute, and *afeminado* were prominent representatives. Similarly, films offered a means of resisting US American imperialism by reaffirming Mexican nationalist virility, despite foreign economic and cultural penetration.¹⁷

During the twenty years between 1940 and 1960, the capital’s political climate changed as well, from a focus more on international events during the Second World War to a focus orientated towards “fixing” the undesirable changes modernity, immigration, and urbanization had wrought. No greater change came when in 1952 Ernesto Uruchurtu, the “Iron Regent” was named mayor of Mexico City. Uruchurtu would preside over the city for fourteen years. During his tenure, roundups on homosexual sites would increase as never before, and he was a central figure in trying to remove the *ambiente* from the capital entirely.¹⁸

¹⁶ Urbanization and industrialization also opened up opportunities that challenged social and gender norms, and mass consumption changed what roles men and women played in public and the domestic spaces.

¹⁷ On film in the period, see Sergio de la Mora, *Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006); Seth Fein, “Myths of Cultural Imperialism and Nationalism in Golden Age Mexican Cinema,” in *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, and Eric Zolov (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 159-198.

¹⁸ Uruchurtu also initiated a number of public works projects and ordered the destruction of various historical centers in the name of progress.

Yet, the shift towards urban living, particularly towards cities with industrial bases, also allowed for the continuing development and expansion of the queer social world. New patrons headed to the (in)famous cantinas, dance clubs, and brothels near the Plaza Garibaldi northwest of the Zócalo or in the Colonia Obrera to south of the Centro. New spaces would become popular, such as the cinemas that filled the voracious demand for film entertainment. New men, many of them young due to the city's youthful population, were initiated into the queer social sphere (and many were popular additions to that sphere). And new bars, many of them catering to a largely queer clientele, came to dot the city's social world like an archipelago, with queer men transitioning between their own social world and the "real" world on a daily basis.

A Note on Sources

Much like in previous chapters, a significant portion of the sources I use come from police reports, case files, and letters to government officials, as well as accounts printed in periodicals that were rarely sympathetic to homosexuals. I often use similar kinds of sources for different aims in order to show the impact of "official" discourses in the public sphere and to effect a partial reconstruction of the queer world. These sources contain information on the locations in which queer men congregated, the appearances of the men who were found in police roundups and investigations, and glimmers of the manners in which such men lived their daily lives. In addition, this section contains information based on private letters, memoirs, and photographic sources that help provide vantage points for understanding life-ways now largely forgotten.

Chapter 6: Masculinity, Development, and Queering the Hijos de la Chingada, 1940-1960

This chapter argues that between 1940 and 1960, xenophobia, nationalism, and homophobia converged in state institutions, official and public sphere articulations of “ideal” masculinity, and in the exercise of state authority against homosexuals. However, Mexico’s “opening” to foreign investment and tourism—which was accelerated during the Second World War—undermined efforts to effect a unitary vision of both national identity and masculinity. That is, at the same time there were efforts made to sell Mexico to the world and demonstrate a stable vision of what Mexico was, a variety of alternatives became more public. And while some of these were successfully subsumed into the broad-based political, social, and cultural coalition fashioned by the PRI, others were not because the coalition relied on them as discursive foils. In this way, despite the increased violence enacted against the *ambiente*, its existence was ensured, as without groups to exclude, Mexican citizenship could not be fully defined. Moreover, the relationship between the PRI and homosexuals at times mirrored its relation to the political opposition: their existence was tolerated as long as they did not seem “dangerous”—a subjective designation located in the same space as the fuzzy definitions of “moral outrages” in public. However, because of the converging pressures of nationalist aims, transnational influences, and increasingly homosexual visibility, made it easier—even perhaps necessary—to repress homosexuals in both practice and the public sphere when homosexuals threatened other elements of the PRI’s coalition. Investigating homosexuality allows us to see the transnational framework in which Mexican nationalism was consciously created and against which it was deployed, however partially, as well as its dependence on the homosexual foil even at moments in which the state’s strength was significantly increased.

In Part I, I discuss the effects that twenty years of post-revolutionary theorizing on the nation, identity, and masculinity had on the period of national political and cultural consolidation

from 1940-1960. Of particular interest are the writings of Samuel Ramos and Octavio Paz, who enshrined the lower-class Mexican as a heteronormative icon of national authenticity who carried meaning stretching back to the colonial period. Both Ramos and Paz asserted that the heteronormativity of lower-class Mexicans was essential to understanding Mexican identity and citizenship, both of which only could incorporate homosexuality as a weapon used to demean others as unmasculine or anti-national. Part II complicates masculinity by showing the simultaneous existence of “multiple masculinities” that were never only at the service of the state, but instead, were carriers of meaning across international borders. Part III discusses new theories and sexological/criminological treatises on homosexuality, as well as the “treatments” carried out, including sex reassignment surgery. Part IV discusses the book *Sodoma pide fuero* and the Casasola murder, two examples of an effort to deterritorialize homosexuality as something foreign that while successful for a short time, ultimately proved pyrrhic.

I. Nationalism, Mexican Identity, and Homosexuality

Although efforts had been made to “clean-up” areas of Mexico City during the two decades following the Revolution, by the early 1940s, these proved unsuccessful in permanently disrupting queer social spaces. In October 1942, Aurelio Torres, president of the *Liga Nacional Contra Los Homosexuales* (National League Against Homosexuals) drafted a letter to Mexican President Ávila Camacho warning of the continued threat that homosexuals posed. While Mexico’s attention was turned towards the international events of World War II, Mexico City police, according to Torres, had become lax in their duties to the capital’s citizens, who needed to be protected from queer sexuality in public by-ways. Addressing the President, Torres stated

Your noble idea in relation to the establishment of national unity, in order to build collective responsibility, principally in international affairs...has been taken by the Jefatura de Policía...as a lack of concern for correcting the illness, already almost national in scope, of effeminacy, called scientifically homosexuality and by the people, *jotería*,

leaving in absolute liberty the sodomites in bureaucratic posts or...in the world of letters, to continue scandalizing, ridiculing the public administration, and exhibiting the Republic's capital as the center of the most disgusting degeneration.¹⁹

In order to stem the tide of this spectacle, Torres's organization had taken evidence to the Police Inspector General of the "truly immoral conduct" of the writers Higinio Vázquez Santa Ana, Adolfo Ornelas Hernández, Salvador Novo, and Ignacio Arzapalo.²⁰

Two *invertidos* cited in the letter elicited special ire: Antonio Bernal, a property manager (*dueño de fincas*) and José Marrón, an employee of newspaper *El Universal*'s subscription department. The men, in particular Bernal, had set up among the Alameda's pergolas (arbors) a "type of open-air office" used "to contract *mayates*" (usually heterosexually-identified young male trade). After "contracting" them, he would take them to his home or that of Marrón, both of which were located nearby.²¹ For the anti-homosexual Liga, such erotic adventures were blemishes on the moral fabric of the capital and the nation.

However, rather than acting on their intelligence, the police had disregarded the warnings while the "wicked ones continue corrupting youth, making a mockery of natural laws and setting a bad example in the cinemas, theaters, offices, and even in public locations." Torres' criticism showed the persistence of Catholic theological perspectives on homosexuality—as "wicked" and

¹⁹ "Liga Nacional Contra los Homosexuales to Avila Camacho," October 21, 1942, AGN, Galeria 3, Manuel Avila Camacho, exp. 540/14.

²⁰ Vázquez Santa Ana was known as the author of *Fiestas y costumbres mexicanas* and *Canciones, cantares y corridos mexicanos*, two books on Mexican popular culture, while both Ornelas Hernández and Arzapalo composed collections of poetry, among other works. Novo was the only one famously known for being homosexual.

²¹ Bernal lived at Humbolt no. 4, just southwest of the park, and Marrón at Santa Maria la Redonda 53, near the Plaza Garibaldi and its bohemian nightlife a short distance northeast. Ibid. *Mayate* is a term for masculine identified men who have sex with other men and often, but not always, take the insertive role during sex and who do not themselves necessarily express a homosexual identity. The term is derived from a local term for dung beetle. Roumagnac defined the term as *pederasta activo* in his positivist study of prisons. See Carlos Roumagnac, *Los criminales en México: Ensayo de psicología criminal* (México: El Fénix, 1904), 77-78. The term is still in use. See, for example, Annick Prieur, *Mema's House, Mexico City: On Transvestites, Queens, and Machos* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 26-27. In contracting men in this fashion, both continued the long-established process of interactions between wealthier men and working-class young men at or near the Alameda Central, and taken to a private residence for parties or sex.

against “natural laws”—and how such rhetoric was rooted in understandings of homosexuality as an aberrant practice rather than a somatic condition. Since matters had not “improved,” the Liga went straight to the top, bypassing the bureaucratic layers that were already contaminated with homosexuals. Torres implored Ávila Camacho to intervene “in the name of social morality” and to order the punishment of “the *invertidos* of this type, among them that figure the persons mentioned in this letter, whose activities are more than repugnant.”²²

This direct appeal to Ávila Camacho followed two years after the letter to Lázaro Cárdenas described in Chapter 3 that had urged him to clean up the area around Cuahutemocztín. Torres’s letter, however was the first specifically on homosexuality.²³ Such an appeal was part of a process of collapsing the national and local into each other, with Mexico City as both a locality with a concern and the seat of national power that could remedy a problem that had long since spread to other corners of the nation. Utilizing tropes of health, prosperity, and morality to denounce the seemingly intractable problem of homosexuality at the nation’s core, Torres hoped to show the stakes of the unchecked homosexual “problem” in terms beyond those of any other constituency with a pet project. He thus invoked the nation’s future, as represented in the idyllic innocent youth who, due to the failure of institutions such as the police, were in constant threat of being corrupted by the *invertidos*. By doing so, Torres attempted to redirect the focus of Mexican leaders back towards domestic concerns at a time when national unity was being stressed in the context of the Second World War before it was too late.²⁴

²² “Liga Nacional Contra los Homosexuales to Ávila Camacho.”

²³ Since colonial times, individuals living in Mexico had made direct appeals to their ultimate superiors, whether to the viceroys or even the monarchs in Spain to the presidents elected after independence. In the modern period, various “leagues” organized for particular political aims often made appeals to leaders, such as the efforts of women suffragists to gain rights in postrevolutionary Mexico. On women’s suffrage, see Olcott, *Revolutionary Women*.

²⁴ As of May 1942, Mexico was a member of the Allies.

Unfortunately, no other information seems to exist about the *Liga Nacional Contra Los Homosexuales*. It is possible that Torres was the only member of the group, a concerned citizen writing to his president from his home (as many Mexicans did) hoping that by creating a “league”—of which there were countless others at the time—he would catch Avila Camacho’s eye more than just a letter from a concerned citizen would. My investigation of news reports during the same period also has not uncovered an upswing in roundups targeting homosexuals in the immediate period after the letter was received.

Open Mexico, Closed Mexico: Manufactured Authenticity and Machismo

Part of the problem, from Torres’s perspective, was that Mexico was focused too much on transnational events. His letter reflected part of the tensions between attempts to “close” Mexican society off from threats and to “open” Mexico to industrial progress, modern development, new media and technology, and tourism. Turn-of-the-century modernity had entailed opening Mexican society and the national economy to foreign influences; Revolutionary rhetoric and the “institutionalized” revolution, in contrast, attempted to limit their impact, aside from instances of international solidarity, such as with the Spanish Republic in the 1930s. Yet, by World War II, Mexico had been drawn more fully into the global system. Thus, efforts to assert a distinct Mexican form of citizenship localized around a powerful, virile citizen were in many ways efforts to manage the consequences of Mexico’s international “opening” to newer industries, tourism, and American culture and to assert a form of Mexican exceptionalism.

What sort of identity was to be promoted in this contested moment? What “authentic” icon could be upheld as distinctly Mexican while the nation was under the onslaught of foreign influence? In 1934 (revised 1938), writer/philosopher Samuel Ramos, claimed that the *pelado*, or the lower-class urban uncouth who was a product of industrialization and migration to cities,

“constituted the most elemental and well defined expression of national character.”²⁵ *Pelados* were low in status and “primitive” in their intelligence; life had been hard, so a *pelado* looked for “fights” wherever he could find them in order to demonstrate virility, his “raft of salvation.” And

the *pelado*’s terminology abounds in sexual allusions that reveal a phallic obsession, born of considering the sexual organ as a symbol of masculine force. In his verbal jousts, he attributes to his adversary an imaginary femininity, reserving the masculine role for himself. With this shrewd ruse, he attempts to affirm his superiority over his opponent.²⁶

The *pelado* was thus perfect, a lower-class individual untouched by foreign influence who could molded into a nationalist icon. The great irony was that Ramos was a member of the Contemporáneos, who had been criticized for “not being Mexican enough” nor “man enough.” And yet, he was “responsible for the mythopoesis of the Mexican man.” Through Ramos, “masculinity became the central issue in the discourse on *lo mexicano*.”²⁷

Ramos never used the terms *macho* and *machismo* in his discussion of the *pelado*. But he reified ideas of masculine honor through sexualized games that would influence later scholars. And he helped to manufacture machismo through his linking of virility, *pelados*, and nationalism. The words *macho* and *machismo* had more limited use before the 1940s, at least in the sense that they are used today. In fact, author Vicente Mendoza asserted that what is considered by many to be “authentic” *machismo* was actually the counterfeit form based on boasting and bravado, rather than the “real” form that stemmed from true courage.²⁸ Américo

²⁵ Samuel Ramos, *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México* (Mexico: Editorial Pedro Robredo, 1938), 77. According to Sergio de la Mora, the literal meaning of *pelado* is “someone whose skin has been flayed and is thus hypersensitive and tends to be on the defensive.” See de la Mora, *Cinemachismo*, 108. As a metaphor for a disempowered working-class man—who was nevertheless co-opted as a national symbol, the *pelado* is a powerful figure. Ramos, born in Michoacan in 1857, spent time in the military, studied at the Sorbonne in Paris, and was a prominent philosopher at UNAM and a member of the prestigious *Colegio Nacional*, an honorary academy comprised of Mexico’s greatest thinkers, artists, and scientists. His oeuvre was concerned with the ontology of the Mexican nation—he was one of the first to do so—and directly influenced Octavio Paz.

²⁶ Ramos, *El perfil del hombre*, 79.

²⁷ Robert McKee Irwin, *Mexican Masculinities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 189.

²⁸ Vincente T. Mendoza, “El machismo en México, al través de las canciones, corridos y cantares,” *Cuadernos del Instituto Nacional de Investigaciones Folklóricas*, no. 3 (1962): 75-86.

Paredes traced the *macho*-style boast to the latter decades of the nineteenth century, finding that the first use of *macho* in *corridos* was during Ávila Camacho's *sexenio*. Indeed, one instance that helped shift the term into wider use was in a *corrido* popular during World War II that bragged about Mexican courage against the Axis and included a reference to president "Ca...macho!"²⁹

Ramos's intellectual descendent was writer Octavio Paz who in 1950 penned *El laberinto de la soledad*. Paz took up issues raised by Ramos—including the trauma of the colonial past, the "inferiority complex" of Mexicans stemming from this past, and the *pelado* as an emblem of national character—and advanced them further. Indeed, Paz's work, more than any other, helped create the myths of *machismo* and the active/passive binary as it sought to explain the Mexican condition. For Paz, the Mexican sex/gender system was divided between those who could *chingar* (fuck; fuck over; open) others and those who were "opened-up" (*rajarse*, cracked open); in this system, women (and the feminine) were inferior because they were "opened up" or "cracked" by a man through penetration, while a man was expected to never "crack" or back down, so as not to be a coward who "opened" himself.³⁰ In other words, the former—*chingar*—signified violence, rape, power, and the ability to force others to do one's will or to take advantage of their weakness; in contrast, *rajarse* signified that weakness and the inability to protect oneself or to prevent being penetrated through actions or words. According to Paz, those who were "opened-up" were "passive, inert, and open, in contrast to the active, aggressive and closed person."³¹ Relationships between the *chingón*—the one who penetrates—and the *chingada*—the penetrated one—allegorically thus played out the same violence that the conquest

²⁹ Américo Paredes, "The United States, Mexico, and 'Machismo,'" *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 8, no. 1 (June 1971): 22.

³⁰ Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico*, trans. Lysander Kemp (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 29-30. Note: Paz asserts that *chingar* does not necessarily have to refer to a sexual act; one can *chingar* someone else without having physical sex. *Chingar*, then, means "to do violence to another." It is a "masculine, active, cruel" word that "stings, wounds, gashes, stains" and "provokes a bitter, resentful satisfaction. See page 77.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 77.

entailed. In Paz's view, life was "combat," with the Mexican *macho* as a "hermetic being, closed up in himself, capable of guarding both himself and whatever has been confided to him."³² Those that could not do so were "inferior," impotent others.

Paz's work, which was incredibly successful at the time it was published and remains influential today, resonated with Mexicans and scholars of the country in part because it offered a schematic of how and why Mexico had evolved into its then present form, rooting the problems it faced in the colonial past and its legacies. In addition, Paz's binary—active/masculine/closed vs. passive/feminine/open—has been understood as the essential binary through which Mexican heterosexual and homosexual relations were organized. *El laberinto de la soledad* provided the theorization that enshrined the active/passive binary as the Mexican gender system—even as in practice sex/gender relationships were more complex—and bolstered the effeminate homosexual as the homosexual archetype. It also encoded *machismo* as something that required the demeaning of other men, including sexually, to function. Yet, his articulation of the binary—which still forms the basis of much social scientific research on Mexican sexuality—obfuscated the true variety of practices and identities that existed after 1940. Indeed, the more accurate argument would be to assert that there were multiple forms of masculinity that were gradually winnowed by the state and cultural forces (including Paz's binary) in the succeeding years. In other words, Paz, like Ramos, used social science and sociological theories to help effect Mexican modernity, nation, and identity.

From this perspective, the crackdowns against homosexuals that amplified during the period were efforts to silence alternative forms of identity and gender norms as they were threats to the stability of the fragile (and hardly hermetic) seals on Mexican masculinity, citizenship,

³² Ibid., 31.

identity. A homosexual “panic” surged because of the increasing visibility of the queer social world, the inability of previous roundups to contain the problem, the failure of penal and medical reforms to “treat” homosexuality, and, most damaging, the proximity of homosexuality to masculine identity itself. Both Ramos and Paz asserted that homosexual inclinations were inherent in machismo, particularly in the word games—*albures*—between men in which one tried to out duel the other with linguistic skill. In such games, power relations between men were homosexualized insofar as the winner symbolically “fucked” the loser, forcing him to swallow his words. Such symbolic violence had consequences for homosexuality itself:

Masculine homosexuality is tolerated, then, on the condition that it consists in violating a passive agent. As with heterosexual relationships, the important thing is not to open oneself up and at the same time to break open one’s opponent.³³

In other words, men could engage, supposedly, in homosexual behaviors as long as they were not penetrated, whether verbally, symbolically, or physically.

This is the basis of the “Latino Mediterranean” or gender-stratified model of sexuality in which homosexual interactions are defined by rigid sex roles, anal penetration, and gendered identity, i.e., with a male/masculine “active” and a female/effeminate “passive” and expected social roles performed by each, such as the “passive” partner doing “women’s work” in relationships. The *pasivo* is the only one marked, according to this model, while the active is an “unmarked male, not officially regarded (and especially not by himself) as ‘homosexual.’”³⁴ Richard Trexler deploys a version of this in *Sex and Conquest*: the Spanish conquest set up the universal emasculation of Native American men by European conquerors, precisely the moment that Paz asserts was the origin of his *hijos de la chingada* mythology, as this emasculation rendered native women—and native peoples’ lands—open to penetration. Succeeding

³³ Ibid., 40.

³⁴ Stephen O. Murray, “Homosexual Categorization in Cross-Cultural Perspective,” in *Latin American Male Homosexualities*, ed. Stephen O. Murray (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 11-14.

generations were therefore the sons of the violated mothers and motherlands and were required to perform their masculinity by violating others, both men and women, to atone for the initial conquest and, ironically, perpetuating it.³⁵ Being penetrated had no status or pleasure.

The weight of Paz's arguments on social scientific work thus cannot be overstated. Sociologist Tomás Almaguer argued that homosexual interactions were dominated by the binary and its supposed stigma on the passive partner, and his text is routinely cited in both Latin American and Latino/a Studies.³⁶ Clark Taylor argued that language itself reinforced the binary; words like *puto*, *maricón*, and *joto*—and obviously others like *afeminado* and *invertido*—stigmatized the passive partners while those referring to *activos*—such as *mayate*, *chichifo*, and *chingón*—did not.³⁷ These extensions of Paz's model, however, are from my perspective insufficient to explain the historical record, but they did advance the mysticism surrounding *machismo*, participating in effecting it like Paz.

To be fair, scholars like Stephen Murray and Joseph Carrier—who argued in favor of the gender-stratified model as representative of Mexican homosexualities—did leave room for questioning the binary. Yet, the inconsistencies and tensions in the binary and the scholarship

³⁵ Richard C Trexler, *Sex and Conquest: Gendered Violence, Political Order, and the European Conquest of the Americas* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995). See in particular page 140. These perspectives leave little room for “passive” homosexuality to inform notions of identity—as it could only entail the destruction of masculinity—nor pleasure—as it was akin to rape and therefore would not be desirable. Moreover, these perspectives enshrine anal penetration as the “real” sex, thereby denying agency of those penetrated—as the individuals who “actively” sought the sex—and demoting other interactions as somehow less authentic.

³⁶ Tomás Almaguer, “Chicano Men: A Cartography of Homosexual Identity and Behavior,” in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993). It seems to me that claiming the experiences of Chicanos, with their own legacies of being oppressed within the American empire, is representative of Mexican experience is a leap to far, even if we allow for potential hierarchies that exists within the experiences of both groups vis-à-vis empire, because of the different experiences of Latino/a Americans and those from Mexico, particularly that of the urban centers in central and southern regions.

³⁷ Clark Taylor, “El Ambiente: Male Homosexual Social Life in Mexico City” (Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1978).

based upon it reveal its limits as a model for understanding Mexican sexuality.³⁸ Both Mendoza and Paredes used folkloric sources for their arguments and showed there was a break between the colonial period and the modern era. Paredes was skeptical that the “rape of some Indian woman by the soldiers of Cortés” led to the formation of Mexican *machismo* as Ramos and Paz argued. Indeed, arguments about the “Mediterranean” model of sexuality are revealed to be a house of cards, as they also rely on continuities with Southern European experience (shared, apparently, by descendents of Latin and Greek civilizations). The active/passive binary, which is built upon the idea of the *macho pelado*, thus is itself suspect. An engaging narrative at first glance, but a faulty, racist, classist, and sexist one based on middle-class fantasies about “authentic” Mexicanness. It is a version of the “cultural” model of sexuality that has labeled the other lower classes as “real” Mexicans and that tried to marginalize negotiations of identity precipitated by Mexico’s participation in transnational circuits.

Returning to the period under discussion, if masculinity was something that had to be continuously performed and defended—masculinity was a “pose” rather than a stable category—then how useful could it be for national projects unless everyone agreed with the model? This was, according to scholar Sergio de la Mora, the role that films would play by helping to disseminate ideas and icons of virile citizenship to the masses through the characters portrayed by Jorge Negrete, Pedro Infante, and others. For de la Mora, such films were part of an “alliance” between the state and machismo that was a “strategy for social co-optation and psychological compensation.”³⁹ While in the 1920s and 1930s words associated with male effeminacy and homosexuality were often also defined in terms of cowardice, as Chapter 3

³⁸ Nevertheless, the binary is important for understanding what occurred in the 1940s and 1950s, as well as the emergence of homosexual liberation as part of the social movements in the 1960s and 1970s.

³⁹ de la Mora, *Cinemachismo*, 87.

argued, by the 1940s, in Gutmann's words, "Mexico came to mean machismo and machismo to mean Mexico."⁴⁰ The *pelado*, then, was the product of a genealogy—a "metamorphosis"—that transitioned him from a rural "primitive" to a revolutionary warrior to the productive citizen-worker desired by the PRI. He was a "new man," definable against his indigenous past and against his modern counterpart, the homosexual; he was the "character embodying the drama of the modern age [who] had to be devised." And while this modern Mexican was "an even more nebulous and mysterious figure than the Indian...his formulation was indispensable for laying the foundations of, and then consolidating, the nationalism of the new Mexican Revolutionary State."⁴¹ As Antonio Yáñez would assert, the *pelado* "is the Mexican in his natural state, and moreover, the representative type of our *mestizo* character."⁴² And importantly, this character was defined in sex/gender terms that helped to delegitimize the liberatory and emancipatory components of the erotic revolution as viable paths towards national unity.

The unresolved problem, however, was that the *pelado* idealized by elites was as much a fiction as it was a fact, particularly as working-class neighborhoods, as will be discussed in Chapter 7, served as important bastions of the *ambiente*, rather than an unequivocally homophobic core from which to launch the virile salvation of the Mexican nation. These areas—and the real-life *pelados* themselves—often resisted being co-opted into or dominated by hegemonic national culture, including through the incorporation of what the intelligentsia deemed antithetical to their vision of the *pelado*—working-class homosexuality—as a vital sector of popular-class neighborhoods and social life. Moreover, while discourses—then and now—might have asserted that active partners bore no stigma for homosexual activities, this is

⁴⁰ Matthew C. Gutmann, *The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 224.

⁴¹ Roger Bartra, *The Cage of Melancholy: Identity and Metamorphosis in the Mexican Character*, trans. Christopher J. Hall (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 90-92.

⁴² Cited in *Ibid.*, 92.

not born out by the period's court cases. Thus, the use of homosexuality as a weapon worked at best hypothetically in the minds of middle-class scholars eager to define what was and was not Mexican through the *pelado* they had constructed, rather than real ones.

So who was the *macho*, then? Was he the homophobic *pelado* who played verbal games with other men and who, as anthropologist Oscar Lewis showed, was “nauseated” by homosexuals who dressed as women?⁴³ Was he the guy who “in a fight would never give up or say, ‘Enough,’ even though the other was killing [him],” and who would go to his death smiling, all while defending his masculine honor and his body from any external penetration?⁴⁴ Or was masculinity something far more complex and contested than many of the scholars above have noted, particularly with regards to homosexuality? As Gutmann noted, Lewis played his own significant role in fashioning stereotypes of *machismo* that would become the important touchstones for other social science work, and the former was rightly skeptical that this sensational idea of *machismo* really is accurate.⁴⁵

Machismo as it is understood today is a product of the 1940s and 1950s. It was tied to state attempts to define the nation and to seek out an “authentic” Mexico, as imagined by elites, that existed among the proletariat. This is not to say that sex/gender hierarchies have not existed. Instead, it serves to call, as scholars like Gutmann have, for more complex understandings of masculinity in the period. *Machismo*, as Lancaster has argued, is resilient because “it constitutes not simply a form of ‘consciousness,’ not ideology in the classical understanding of the concept,

⁴³ Oscar Lewis, *The Children of Sánchez: Autobiography of a Mexican Family* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), 75. The homosexuals were going for festivities in the city. Roberto also saw homosexuals in prison, as described on pages 229-230.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁴⁵ Gutmann, *The Meanings of Macho*, 231-232.

but a field of productive relations.”⁴⁶ Within those relations, the active/passive binary, the Latino-Mediterranean model of sexuality, the *pelado* as “new man,” and the nation are simultaneously created. Yet, this was as much a transnational project as a nationalist one that would take on specific meanings as Mexico sought to define itself against American imperialism and the homosexual as foreign other. It is no wonder that struggle would be a central theme in articulating virile citizenship. Through the fighting man—the man who had troubled origins and had to defend himself against a variety of threats—the state could imagine itself in position of power vis-à-vis its opponents—national and international—and co-opt diverse sectors of society together as part of its projects, at least for a time. The condensation of the Mexican citizen as “virile”—formed at the convergence of the national, transnational, and homosexuality—had thus found its most sustained articulation.

Homosexuality as Foreign and Anti-Mexican in the Cultural Sphere

Another campaign of Mexican resistance against the “foreign” homosexual occurred in the cultural sphere. Hollywood was a popular target in these discussions, because Mexico was inundated with films that were vectors for foreign culture and ideas. *Crisól*, in 1934, for example, called Hollywood toxic in large part because of the sexual perversion that it promoted in every corner of the globe, which could be verified by the “rise of universal homosexuality.”⁴⁷ Twenty years later, Bill Llano, a columnist for the magazine *Impacto*, echoed these ideas in multiple columns and decried the US’s influence. In October 1955, he asserted that there were *gente rara*—“strange folk”—in the arts, politics, theater, and the cinema who were marked by their “biological tragedy.” These people were ill, and while it was “idiotic to hate them, despise

⁴⁶ Roger N. Lancaster, *Life Is Hard: Machismo, Danger, and the Intimacy of Power in Nicaragua* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 19.

⁴⁷ Agustín Aragón Leiva, “Hollywood y la cinematografía,” *Crisól* (March 1, 1934): 160-161.

them, insult them, [or] beat them” it was also “idiotic not to treat them as their pathological condition requires.” He compared homosexuals to lepers who were put in leper colonies to safeguard society; he wondered why homosexuals, who were more dangerous when passing among normal folk—and who could influence youth—were allowed to do so freely.⁴⁸ Four years later, he reaffirmed that homosexuality was a “stain” on Mexico in the aftermath of the Casasola murders, which had illuminated the scandalous lives of artists, among others.⁴⁹

In June 1958, it was Elvis Presley that drew his ire. Presley was “androgynous” and put on performances in which he exhibited “homosexual shakings;” he was, “the symbol of man’s disgrace in this century” who provoked “hysteria” in Mexican youths of both sexes. Never before had Llano seen together in a single film “as much cretinism” and “homosexual dirt” as in Presley’s *Jailhouse Rock* (1957). However, the blame for Presley’s appeal rested with Mexican parents who imposed a “religion that ignores the body” upon their youths, leading them to become “rebels without a cause” against authority by embracing rock n’ roll.⁵⁰ Presley had already been a target of homophobia, as movie posters for *Los chiflados de rock n’ roll* (1957) starting Luis Aguilar, Agustín Lara, and Pedro Vargas depicted Presley in drag with a well-developed-ass, a continuing trope of male homosexuality; on the other side of the poster, two stereotypical Mexican revolutionary *charros* shot at him with their guns under the caption “Die Elvis Presley!” In 1959, the screening of his film *King Creole* would ignite riots in the capital.

These are but a few examples of the perspectives circulating at the time, but they show how Mexico, under the onslaught of American cultural forms, sought to distinguish itself from those forms by claiming they promoted homosexuality, a distinctly anti-Mexican trait. And when

⁴⁸ Bill Llano, “Los espectaculos: “Cuatro Mujeres” y el desastre de la television,” *Impacto*, October 22, 1955.

⁴⁹ Bill Llano, “La escandalosa vida privada de los artistas,” *Impacto*, October 14, 1959, 55.

⁵⁰ Bill Llano, “Los espectaculos: Elvis Presley,” *Impacto*, June 25, 1958, 56.

homosexuality was found among Mexican artists, people like Bill Llano were on hand to excoriate them and decry the “social stain” that they had left on Mexican society, while also linking them to the depravity of Hollywood and other cultural sources.

II: Multiple Masculinities

The ideal solution for combating cultural influence from abroad was to bolster the virile Mexican citizen. However, Mexican masculinity was a far more complicated terrain than imagined.⁵¹ After 1940, at least four different forms of masculinity competed and overlapped in the Mexican public sphere. Among these were “elegant” masculinity, physical culture, and *lucha libre*. The fourth type, investigated in great detail by Sergio de la Mora, was media masculinity, found in the “buddy” movies of Mexican cinema’s “golden age.”⁵² These types were not mutually exclusive; for example, they shared certain aspects of hygiene and athleticism and advertisements for men’s products would at times combine different masculinities in their ads.

“Masculine Elegance” and Cosmopolitan Identity

Perhaps the most surprising form of masculinity that splashed its way across the pages of Mexican periodicals was “elegant” or “gentleman’s” masculinity. This form was most apparent in the various products—ranging from fine-tailored suits to beauty and hygiene products—that were advertised to men, particularly those of the middle-class, in mainstream publications like the newspaper *Excelsior*. Certain goods were both elegant and masculine, featuring in numerous advertisements; these included the well-fitting suit, stylish tie, and fine hat.

Take the ads appearing in October 1942, a month that was representative of the frequency and type of ads that could be found in the early 1940s. That month, the venerable haberdasher

⁵¹ This corroborates Gutmann’s thesis that masculinity was far more complicated than it has been defined in the past.

⁵² See de la Mora, *Cinemachismo*.

High-Life on Madero street offered a “great exhibition” of “Wall-Street” shirts made from “imported poplin” cloth, each costing \$14.50 (pesos), in early October 1942. The white shirts—accented by fine lines of blue, green, or beige and offered with two collars—were accompanied by matching silk ties costing eight pesos. Customers could even count on the High-Life’s “exclusive service” of offering extra fabric to customers so that another collar could be made for the shirt. Another shop located at 40 Tacuba street enticed discerning customers with “weekly bargains” that included imported “zephyr” shirts from England and from the brands Society, MacAllen, and Arrow. Thirty models of winter “Disney” hats, the “best of the best” straight from 5th Avenue New York and in numerous styles and colors, could be exclusively obtained at El Palacio de Hierro, one of the most stylish department stores. A smaller ad above the Palacio ad touted the skills of local shop Sastrería Victor who told readers to “allow us to make you your best suit, even more elegant for the same price.”⁵³

In the synopsis of advertisements, several trends are revealed. All of the advertisements offered images to illustrate their wares and catch the eye; in all four cases, the men were dressed in a tie and dress shirt; both Sastrería Victor and El Palacio de Hierro’s drawings were of men also wearing suits and hats. In all four there were also appeals made to the taste of the reader and to his desire for exclusivity, imported finery, and “bargains.” Masculine elegance came from access to well-fitting, well-made clothing, from skillful local tailors and foreign companies, although the latter was more prominently advertised on the page.

A week later, an ad that appeared in *Excelsior* offering Van Heusen shirts suggested that a man “complete” his elegance with a fine Van Heusen tie or that wearing the “high-quality”

⁵³ All of these ads can be found in *Excelsior*, October 5, 1942, sec. 1, 2.

clothing would itself lend a “manly” elegance.⁵⁴ Another ad for Van Heusen shirts urged readers to “realize your masculine elegance” on October 21. Similar promises of achieving “elegance” through the purchase and use of products appeared in following editions. *El Mundo Elegante*, located a block from the Zócalo, offered fashionable velour hats straight from New York in their October 15 and 16 ads for thirty pesos.⁵⁵ Shoppers could also purchase a “Stetson” hat for between thirty and 700 pesos. A man could realize his “supreme elegance” by wearing one of the new styles of hats offered in the *Sombrerería Nacional*’s catalogue and store at no. 30 calle Tacuba, an October 17 ad touted.⁵⁶ Four days later, an ad for the *Asociación Mexicana de Sombreros* informed readers that men could “distinguish” themselves by always wearing a sombrero and that buying a hat could translate into new opportunities for wealth.⁵⁷ “Elegance” in this way was tied to financial opportunities, social advancement, and the ability to show one’s “distinction” to others through the use of an appropriate hat. Another ad on October 23 for a local business—Sanjenís—boasted of a new factory that produced “the best hats” due to the “most modern equipment” that had been installed in Mexico; technological innovation was thus tied with the elegant product. In addition, the picture in the ad showed a young woman who was “enchanted” by the Stetson she held, showing the hat’s appeal to the opposite sex.

Thus, by wearing one of the hats, a man could demonstrate his elegance, modernity, sophistication, and sex-appeal, while also reaping the benefits of participating in Mexican

⁵⁴ “Para el hombre elegante,” *Excelsior*, October 12, 1942, sec. 2, 9. These ads for “masculine elegance” appeared in Mexico at the same time that ads from similar outfits like Van Heusen appeared in the United States, touting the fabrics, comfortable fit, and new styles of clothing. By 1942, several of these included references to the ongoing world war and the US homefront. In these ads, the explicit appeals to elegance made in the Mexican ads are missing, although quality and at times luxury are asserted. Van Heusen, for example, frequently cited the practical benefits of their shirts—particularly that they did not need to be ironed and were comfortable—rather than the attainment of “supreme elegance.”

⁵⁵ See the ads for *El Mundo Elegante* in *Excelsior* on October 15, 1942, sec. 1, 2 and October 16, 1942, sec. 1, 2.

⁵⁶ “Suprema elegancia,” *Excelsior*, October 17, 1942, sec. 2, 4.

⁵⁷ “Compró un sombrero y multiplicó su dinero,” *Excelsior*, October 21, 1942, 7.

industrial development and transnational fashions. While some ads, such as the one for Sanjenís, were coded with heterosexuality, many were not explicit about their clientele's sexual preferences. This meant that homosexual men, often considered "arbiters of fashion," could also see themselves in the ads. Generally speaking, the ads also positioned men as objects, both to emulate in terms of their style and modernity and to be desired for their elegance and beauty.

Other products were marketed to men in terms of "elegance." One brand—Varón Dandy by Perfumeria Parera (Barcelona)—explicitly linked dandyism, elegance, and consumption of fine goods in their October 7, 1942 advertisement.⁵⁸ Under a blurb highlighting the firm's lotion, cologne extract, soap, pomade, brilliantine, shaving cream, facial massage, and talcum powder, a man in a short-coat tuxedo and monocle leans against a wall, staring past the viewer. One hand is tucked in his pants, while the other lazily holds a cigarette; he is a "gentleman" because, according to the brand's slogan, only "A 'Gentleman' uses Varón Dandy."⁵⁹ The use of the English word "gentleman" highlighted the brand's transnational character and the universality of a how a gentleman would look; the products themselves delineated how gentlemen were to smell and appear when groomed. In addition, the man's appearance directly reference aristocracy; in the rhetoric of the post-Revolutionary period in Mexico, this would have immediately conjured associations with the Porfiriato and homosexuality. Even so, this ad would appear on more than one occasion in Mexican periodicals, and the brand would remain popular for generations.

⁵⁸ See the in *Excelsior*, October 7, 1942, 14. Varón Dandy appears to originate in 1912 as a brand of Parera. This Spanish brand was known for other fragrances and products such as "Tentación" "Cocaina en flor" for women. Varón Dandy was their hallmark brand for men, and it was popular throughout Latin America and Spain. See José Ignacio Alvarez-García, "Masculinidad como espectáculo: Modernidad y consumismo en España (1898-1931)" (Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2008).

⁵⁹ Other ads (appearing most likely outside of Mexico and only available as images, rather than contextualized documents) noted the fragrance's "extremely masculine and aristocratic" character, as well as its qualities of "hygiene, elegance, and distinction." While no official site remains, information gleaned from internet posts suggests that the fragrance incorporated "spiciness", "wood notes", "powdery" scents, floral scents, and the "exotic" or "oriental" in its fragrance profile.

Cigarettes such as the one that the gentleman in the Varón Dandy ad held also carried an association with elegance. One Mexican brand—Elegantes, by the company El Buen Tono—openly traded on such an association, as well as the links between modernity, hygiene, and elegance. Their ad from October 19, 1942 asserted that due to their “unique” factory, they could produce quality tobacco products, all elegantly wrapped in rice-paper, without the problem of undesirable “powder” that would mark an inferior product “All of Mexico knows that they protect your health because they do not contain powder,” the ad promised.⁶⁰ Modernity was also paired with tradition insofar that the formula remained “unaltered” in the blending of the tobacco; in this way, elegance was assured through quality stemming from generations of experience and modern production methods. Moreover, like other ads dealing with “masculine elegance” this ad portrayed the busts of men wearing suits and ties.

Even the soda 7-Up got into the act in an ad on Saturday, October 17. While affirming the utility of the beverage for “mixed drinks”, it also showed a dance party in which men in suits and women in fine dresses drank 7-Up.⁶¹ Elegance was further tied to modernity, as readers were urged to listen during their Saturday soirees to Juan Garcia Esquivel and his orchestra on the radio station XEW at 11 pm as they performed “7-Up’s program of dance music.” 7-Up, after all, was the beverage that “satisfies those who demand the best,” precisely the “gentlemen” pictured in the ad and others described above.

As these examples demonstrate, advertisers, companies (foreign and Mexican) and retail shops had a specific sector of Mexican society in mind in their ads. They used specific words—including “gentleman” and “elegance”—and images—such as the man in a fine-cut suit or hat—to link modernity with the consumption and exhibition of products. Fashionable male elegance

⁶⁰ See the ad for Elegantes Cigarettes, *Excelsior*, October 19, 1942, 11.

⁶¹ Ad for 7-Up, *Excelsior*, October 17, 1942, 9.

was something that could be determined through the use of the right sort of products in the right sort of settings, and men would be “distinguished” by the products they used. Given the frequency of these ads in the early 1940s—the examples from October 1942 are but a case study of a larger trend—“elegance” had important cultural cachet among the Mexican middle and upper-classes, as well as those seeking upward mobility and incorporation into modern development, at least in terms of applying the “modern look.”

Yet, how can we account for these advertisements that appeared so prevalently and prominently in the first section of *Excelsior* and other periodicals, particularly given the decades-long association between elegance and conspicuous consumption with homosexuality and male effeminacy? Did “manly elegance” mean that the position or role of the dandy—previously associated with homosexuality or at least non-normative gender—had been appropriated by presumably heteronormative male clientele? Had stylish middle-class Mexicans disassociated homosexuality from understandings of men’s conspicuous consumption in a way previously impossible in the wake of the Famous 41 scandal? Were such advertisements consciously including the cognizant of the homosexual market itself?

As late as 1941, the dandy continued to be associated with homosexuality, at least by some in the public sphere. Cabral’s January 1941 *Jueves de Excelsior* cover and caption, which I described in the introduction, linked male effeminacy, conspicuous consumption, “elegant” fashion, and scents together, drawing on and reinforcing stereotypes of the Famous 41, the dandy/ephebe as a stylish fop, and even perfume (as represented by the flower held by the dandy) as effeminate and homosexual. How could such an image—particularly as juxtaposed

against the coarse-looking *charro*—not be understood as indicting conspicuous consumption as an emasculating or corrupting influence on men? That, after all, was part of the joke.⁶²

A week after Cabral's cover, another image appeared in *Jueves de Excelsior*; although a monochromatic line drawing, the image once again associated homosexuality with the finely-tailored suit, jauntily-positioned hat (which looks rather similar to the Stetsons and "elegant" hats offered in the ads), cane, and heeled shoes.⁶³ To reinforce his use of facial products, the dandy is shown with lips painted in a heart, which referenced the popular fashion for female stars in the first decades of the century. Where was the line between appropriate forms of conspicuous consumption—denoted by the similarly suited Varón Dandy man—and those that invoked the 41? In fact, without the tag sticking off the man's suit that read "El 41," the question remains whether or not the man would have been recognized *as* a homosexual or perhaps as someone who had attained their supreme elegance. Moreover, would not either sort of man still have faced a measure of ridicule, given the continuing valence of discourses associating physical affectations with effeminacy and as anti-masculine?

The 1941 painting *Los paranóicos, los espíritufláuticos, los megalómanos* by Antonio Ruiz (El Corocito) also captured the continued relevance of stereotypes linking the dandy and homosexuality.⁶⁴ Flanked by two women (Maria Asúnsolo and Guadalupe Marín) are four men: Agustín Lazo, Salvador Novo, Roberto Montenegro, Xavier Villaurrutia. All were members of the Contemporáneos, and all were homosexuals (although not all were as well-known to be so as Novo). The six-person party walks across a square in front of a palace of government marked with the dates 1810-1941; the latter number is a reference to the Famous 41 (much like the

⁶² *Jueves de Excelsior*, as the title suggests, was a weekly published by the same company as *Excelsior*.

⁶³ Illustration can be found in *Jueves de Excelsior*, January 9, 1941, pg. 3.

⁶⁴ Antonio (El Corcito) Ruiz, *Los paranóicos, los espíritufláuticos, los megalómanos*, oil on wood, 1941.

inclusion of the number “41” on the *señorito* in Cabral’s cover), as are other aspects of the painting, from the inclusion of the colors green and lavender in the skin—which can also be found in Cabral’s cover—and fashions the men wore to the presence of a *balero* (cup and ball toy) in the paintings foreground.⁶⁵

Lest we think that some major shift had occurred between 1941 and 1942 that allowed for unquestioned consumption by men, concerns still circulated throughout the decade about the attention men paid to their appearance. Columnist and presbytery José Canto Corro mused in *El Universal* on January 1, 1948 what was to be done with the young male students called “*bonitos*” who “curled their hair and rolled up their socks and plucked their eyebrows and walked like *maricones*.”⁶⁶ Canto Corro’s critique was that the line between an elegant male and homosexual was unclear, and that such interest in fashion was actually feminizing Mexican youth. Thus, even as foreign outfits such as Van Heusen and Varón Dandy and local purveyors like El Buen Tono sought to purvey their products to the Mexican male consumer by asserting their necessity or utility for “masculine elegance,” a counter discourse existed that invoked legacies of the 41.

A more concrete illustration can be found in the use of scented products, the consumption of which had long been ambiguous in terms of affirming or undermining masculinity. A *Jueves de Excelsior* article in November 1945 noted how the proximity to certain kinds of products would produce physical and behavior effects on those nearby:

Even though it appears a little exaggerated, the activity of the shop clerk ultimately influences their character, and their psyche is transformed little by little until converting them into beings easily identifiable by whomever is slightly observant.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Antoino Marquet, author of several published print-based works on homosexual cultures in Mexico, made this assertion in “El arte homosexual en México (a vuelo de pájaro) - CIUDADANIASX,” http://www.ciudadaniasx.org/article.php3?id_article=440. Accessed May 27, 2012.

⁶⁶ José Canto Corro, “Año Feliz,” *El Universal*, January 1, 1948, 37.

⁶⁷ Octavio Colmenares, “El hombre del mostrador,” *Jueves de Excelsior*, November 15, 1945.

Clerks selling jewelry, for example, became tycoons, while those selling shoes suffered psychological damage due to being in a servile position. Clerks hawking sporting equipment were very masculine, but the same could not be said for those dealing in more “feminine” products. “Have you chatted sometime with the salesclerk of a perfumery?” asked Colmenares, noting that,

If [the clerk] had some years dedicated to that activity, it would be easy to see that the continual dealing with the opposite sex, had exercised in him certain influence, that of—although it appears strange—the *afeminado*. If you observe carefully, you will see how his movements are so affected and you will notice that his voice possesses soprano inflections, or at least of a tenor.⁶⁸ Even his dress and trimming his mustache shows you that this man has something, very little maybe, but always something effeminate.⁶⁹

Colmenares’s observations clearly linked the proximity to perfumes and women to the shop clerk’s feminization, with changes in his voice, mannerisms, and fashion-sense. In this way, Colmenares’s referenced perspectives dating back at least to the time of *Chucho el ninfo*, as well as psychological and medical-juridical theories associating the social environment with the “corruption” of an individual’s masculinity. In fact the very products that promised elegance were those that threatened to feminize an individual, and the cumulative effects of such products on those who used them resulted in physical and behavioral changes. The fancy Madero Avenue and Centro shops, therefore, could contaminate masculinity just like the poor barrio where poverty and alcohol disrupted family cohesion; in either location, masculinity lacked sufficient role-models for its preservation against the constant encroachment of degradation.

The simultaneity of discourses both lauding and critiquing masculine elegance indicates that even two decades after the Revolution, no solid definition of Mexican masculinity had been articulated. Moreover, class continued to play a role in determining what men could do in terms

⁶⁸ “Campy” would be another appropriate term to use here for the word *amanerados*.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

of self-expression. Although the working-class had lampooned bourgeois dandies from the turn-of-the-century and many men had sought to disassociate themselves with practices and appearances coded as feminine or homosexual, a sufficient market remained to warrant the effusive advertising found in *Excelsior*. And there were significant competing interests expressed by merchants, different types of consumers, and cultural critics that coexisted in 1940s Mexico. Mexico's opening to external investment and culture brought both the opportunity for Mexican men to engage in transnational patterns of consumption and fashion, as well as a grounds for further criticism over the changes being wrought in Mexican society by these very forces.

Behind Every Macho Playboy Is a Mother with Sloan's Liniment and the Discarded Past of a 44-Kilo Weakling

Another form of masculinity that contrasted with that of the dandy's masculine elegance could be found in Mexico's burgeoning physical culture. This culture—which could be found in gyms, exhibited in photographs and advertisements in periodicals, and performed for admiring audiences in athletic events, among other locations—reveled in the physically developed male body as a masculine symbol of power and identity. One aspect of the culture was the dissemination of the male form. As noted before, this was underway by the time of the Revolution and accelerated thereafter. Physique culture—based on the cultivation of muscles in the homosocial/erotic spaces like the YMCA and the adoration of male athletes—thrived within the post-revolutionary urban cultural spheres of the 1920s and 1930s. By the 1940s and 1950s, male bodies frequently appeared in periodicals, with boxers being a common subject; in fact, the ubiquity of shirtless and partially nude men—whether in photographs or line drawings and

caricatures—challenges assumptions made about the cultural taboos of seeing male bodies.⁷⁰ In reality, the male body never was hidden from view as might have been expected, as gazing at a man would “open” him up to another’s desire, if Paz’s model was accurate.⁷¹ Moreover, as the examples will show, Mexican understandings of the body were enmeshed in transnational circuits of consumption, not simply nationalist rhetoric.

For example, in March 1941, a Charles Atlas ad appeared in *Jueves de Excelsior*. This ad showcased Atlas’s body, clad only in his famous leopard print bikini briefs, under the promise of only “15 minutes a day” of his exercise program to become a “new man” just like Atlas himself.⁷² “I too was a wimp (*alfenique*) of 44 kilos,” asserted the caption next to Atlas’s imposing physical form; this was a version of the classic “97-pound weakling” advertisements that were found frequently in magazines and comic books during the 1940s in the United States. Like the US ads, the Mexican ad offered readers a coupon that could be mailed to New York for a free booklet on Atlas’s “Dynamic Tension” exercises (translated from *Everlasting Health and Strength* into Spanish as *Salud y fuerzas perdurables*).⁷³

Atlas ads would continue appearing in Mexican periodicals thereafter. Another example from *Excelsior*’s August 24, 1947 edition once again showcased Atlas’s body and muscles—posed in the leopard print briefs—as well as more detailed information about his training system. To further drive home the point, the ad contained a cartoon in which a skinny young man (Pepe)

⁷⁰ Sergio de la Mora mentions such taboos in the preface to his book *Cinemachismo*. See de la Mora, *Cinemachismo*, x. I have heard the same claims made myself in Mexico, i.e., that the male body was closely guarded, particularly in public forums, with the beach as the one major exception.

⁷¹ In the 1970s, Mexican magazines like *Chicas* even ran images of nude men (without full-frontal shots) in their “Galería de Adán” section; these magazines were marketed towards teenage girls interested in movie stars, athletes, and fotonovelas.

⁷² “15 minutos al día: Un hombre nuevo,” *Jueves de Excelsior*, March 6, 1941.

⁷³ I am not sure when this translation actually occurred; images from antique text markets suggest it was extant by at least 1947, but the Spanish-language ads suggest by at least earlier in the decade. The ad was part of Atlas’s internationalization of his program, which drew response from individuals the “world over” according to ads.

is bullied and beaten by a larger man who then steals his girl Alicia; the skinny fellow then bulks up using Atlas's methods and pummels the bully, taking back Alicia who, at the conclusion of the strip, exclaims that Pepe has finally become "a real man!"⁷⁴

Although such materials contained heterosexual perspectives—everything from women adoring the new masculine bodies to participating in the ridicule of those who did not want the Atlas look—at a very basic level, men were being invited to gaze in admiration at the male form and to desire that body. As the cartoon urged both Pepe and the reader, "look at those muscles!" Atlas himself, in the advertisement's pitch, asked readers to "look at my body as it is today" and see that his muscles were not "painted" on him; he promised that what he had done with his body could be achieved in others if they adhered to the methods of his Dynamic Tension program.

What appeal did Atlas have for a Mexican audience? First, he made the ideas of an invulnerable virile citizen possible—insofar as this was built upon muscular strength—and he facilitated the transition from slimmer, culturally sophisticated forms of masculinity to that which developed larger bodies. This was important particularly as more Mexican males worked in sedentary jobs—such as clerical or professional positions—rather than as part of physical labor. In this way, middle-class men could also exert their virile citizenship in a visible form, proving their bodies were not weakened by jobs outside industry. The irony, of course, was that the solution for developing Mexican weaklings into "real men" came from a foreign bodybuilder.

Indeed, the Atlas ads spoke to concerns about how to effectively demonstrate masculinity and to make it legible. No longer was it simply enough to be biologically male (if it had ever been so); to be a "real man," an individual had to cultivate the physical form. Such a performance entailed hard work and constant maintenance, even if only for Atlas's 15 minutes a

⁷⁴ At least the English-language versions of these ads were the brainchild of Charles Roman who for decades headed-up Atlas's company.

day. It also entailed the use of appropriate products and the need for the male body to be exhibited not only for the approval of other women, but more importantly, for consumption and admiration by other men who themselves were asked to both desire and emulate the body shown.

An advertisement for Gillette razor blades is an example. A woman in swimwear is foregrounded in the image and she, like the reader, is invited to see the man on the diving board as desirable. A reader might conclude, then, that using Gillette blades would make him desirable to women. However, the image is not unequivocally heteronormative, as the male reader was also called upon to see the champion diver's lithe body as appealing. In this way, the ad mirrored the homoerotic possibilities that were part of the Atlas ads.⁷⁵

Another cartoon advertisement—"Un Hombre Doblegado" (A Humbled Man) by "Dolores"—on October 17, 1942 reinforced the need for products to maintain masculinity, particularly when it was damaged. In the cartoon, a young man, in a bathing suit and standing next to his attractive girlfriend, shows off his body after swimming, obviously having performed. In the second panel, he is bent over, grabbing his aching back; his girlfriend, from the other side of the pool, wonders who it is, already having forgotten, presumably, how her boyfriend looks because his masculinity appears "broken." "It's your Tarzan with lumbago," the other woman retorts.⁷⁶ In the third panel, the young man, sits on his bed while his mother rubs on Sloan's Liniment, which promised to "alleviate rheumatic, muscular, and neurologic pains."⁷⁷ "Do it harder, mom," the man says; perhaps this is a nod to his ability to endure pain? In the final panel,

⁷⁵ Advertisement for Gillette razor blades in *Excelsior*, October 13, 1942, sec. 2, 5.

⁷⁶ "Tarzan" was not necessarily a positive comment. For example, it was used in Ek's piece on El Dragón de Oro to refer to the men accompanying *afeminados* in the bar; he remarked that they were among the "rednecks" (*quintopatieros*, literally "fifth patio-ers", meaning very poor) he saw there. See Ek, "Cabaret de homosexuales." This would speak to the perceived primalness of Tarzan, his lack of civilization, and need for products to maintain his masculinity more properly.

⁷⁷ Andrew Sloan, a self-taught veterinarian from Pennsylvania, developed the formula in his care of horses in the 1850s; his son Earl popularized it for use among humans later in the century, by the early twentieth century, the product was available in the North America, Australia, Latin America, and Europe.

the young man is out with his girlfriend on the town, wearing a fine suit and tie. “How quickly you recovered,” she remarks. “That’s how I am,” he replies, thinking of the liniment.⁷⁸

Masculinity, as this cartoon so clearly depicted, was (and is) performed. In fact, performance book-ends the cartoon. If the advertisement’s cartoon is to be believed, then the price of performing masculinity was potential injury and the loss of the very masculinity that one had cultivated. Since heteronormative masculinity depended on athletic prowess, an injury threatened to make the man queer, both in terms of his ability to perform masculinity and his functioning of his body, as well as the recognition of him as appropriately masculine. The solution was to use the product, which in the panels takes on Oedipal undertones as the mother applies the ointment so that her son could recover. Heteronormativity is thus reaffirmed by the end of the panel and the product enshrined as the vector for achieving it. Yet, the limits of maintaining masculinity without such products are abundantly clear.

What makes this article even more significant is that it showed that the various forms of masculinity were not mutually exclusive nor necessarily oppositional; after being “repaired” by the ointment, the young man, who started the cartoon showing off his physical form, was now dressed elegantly for a night out with his girlfriend. He thus in the span of a single day affirmed his masculinity as both athletic and elegant. And, like the other ads, the products used to make a man masculine originated, at least in design, from foreign sources. Did that mean the proletariat and middle-classes who used them were already lost for Mexico’s national project?

Alternative Masculinities: “Exóticos” and Lucha Libre

On Saturday, April 5, 1952, television network Televisión (XEW-TV, Channel 2) aired a *lucha libre* fight.⁷⁹ *Lucha libre* was (and is) Mexico’s form of professional wrestling—which blended

⁷⁸ Dolores, “Un hombre doblegado,” *Excelsior*, October 17, 1942, sec. 2, 5.

melodrama, staged fights, and acrobatics together. Matches were a regular part of the station's fare and part of why the 1950s would come to be remembered the "era of Televiscentro."⁸⁰ What set the telecast on XEW-TV apart was one of the wrestlers: Lalo el Exótico. Lalo was a special breed of the male wrestler: as an *exótico*, his dandified self-presentation contrasted starkly with the *machismo* of other *luchadores*. Even more, his performance drew upon stereotypes of homosexuality, particularly those that linked male effeminacy with sexual deviance: he appeared before the studio audience and on the television screen "powdered, with his lips painted and mascara on his eyes."⁸¹ What was worse, he "did not lose an opportunity to make note of his category—true or fictitious—of sexual invert" through his actions.

As *El Universal* speculated, it was unclear whether Lalo el Exótico was truly an *afeminado*, and therefore performing something of his own identity, or just camping it up as part of his act. Authenticity, in this case, did not matter, as he was, by virtue of his performance, the opposite of the honorable, heteronormative *luchador* fighting the honorable fight. The ambiguity of Lalo el Exótico's sexuality only fueled the deviance of the spectacle, as it raised the specter of what kind of man would *want* to perform as a dandy and potential "invert" and make a career of not only mocking his opponents and their supporters in the audience, but normative masculinity itself. Such a career challenged a core, if contested, value of the post-Revolutionary period.

Part of the scandal that *exóticos* caused was that their performances were on display for the public. What made Lalo's fight an even worse "obscene spectacle" was that it was broadcast

⁷⁹ "Un procaz espectáculo anoche en Televiscentro," *El Universal*, April 6, 1952, 14. Televiscentro, then owned by Emilio Azcárraga, was the precursor to the media conglomerate Telesistemas Mexicanos (1955-1973) and then Televisa, which was formed in 1973 and remains owned by the Azcárraga family.

⁸⁰ Though, the broadcast was not the first of professional wrestling on Mexico's new television stations; rival XHTV (Channel 4) had already been broadcasting matches since November 1950. Rómulo O'Farril owned the station.

⁸¹ The phrase *ojos enrilemados* (sic) is used to describe Lalo el Exótico's eyes. The term is likely misspelled due to typological metathesis and the term *enrimelados* was intended, derived from the term *rimel*, a synonym for "mascara" derived from the name of the makeup brand Rimmel.

on television, a form of communication that enabled his preening and campy stereotypes to reach a wider audience than allowed for in a wrestling arena. That the fight itself had occurred in front of an audience at the Televiscentro studios on Avenida Chapultepec already showed “bad taste;” that it “arrived at the heart of homes through television” was a danger necessitating an immediate response. In this way, television was even more threatening than cinema. While going to the cinema necessarily entailed leaving the safety of the “house” for a trip through “contamination” of the “street,” television brought the outside world’s obscenities—exemplified in Lalo el Exótico’s deviant performance—inside. Television permeated the barriers—however porous they actually were—between the home’s sanctity and the street’s contagions.

Concerned parents had already contacted *El Universal*’s editorial staff the same night as the fight, imploring them to intervene and to urge the Secretaría de Comunicaciones to “impede the repetition of such a degrading spectacle and to fine those culpable for having presented it.” Agreeing with the parents, the newspaper surmised that Lalo “should be in the penitentiary,” a punishment that befell actual homosexuals who were rounded-up by the police.

Despite this public outcry, Lalo el Exótico continued to perform. He was advertised as part of the bouts on Saturday, June 21, 1952 that were televised from Televiscentro.⁸² He also appeared at official state functions. A large ad in *El Nacional* advertised his bout with Mario Prado as part of the “Tercera Gran Fiesta del Pueblo Mexicano” held at the Plaza de Toros “México.” This event, to which the PRI Regional Executive Committee offered free tickets, included other bouts, as well as three bands—including mariachis—entertainers, and bull fights. All of this was in honor of Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, the PRI’s candidate for the 1952 presidential

⁸² “Black Guzmán se impondrá esta noche,” *Excelsior*, June 21, 1952, 10. On his way to the match with Black Guzmán, Médico Asesino won bouts against two other luchadores named Gardenia and la Tonina. The former may have been Gardenia Davis, while the later was Tonina Jackson, an overweight wrestler who also was a dandy.

election. Organizers presented a range of events that would interest a broad range of potential voters. They also offered a snapshot of Mexican popular culture and masculinity, and at the center, literally since he fought in the second bout, was Lalo el Exótico.⁸³ That October, he appeared in the film *El luchador fenómeno*, along with other wrestlers; this format brought him to wider attention.⁸⁴

How was it possible for the dandy luchador to not only continue appearing on television but also to be in film and to participate in a celebration in honor of the PRI's chosen candidate for president? Given the roundups that were underway at the same time, it is very unlikely that the PRI sought to curry favor with homosexual voters. One clue exists in an article printed a decade earlier on luchadores in January 1941 in *Jueves de Excelsior*. The article, written by Manuel Montero and illustrated with shirtless photos of lean and masculine fighters, described how one fighter—Ray de Alva—knew not only how to do strangle holds, Nelson holds, and blows to the liver, but he also read Victor Hugo, played the guitar, and “taught modern dance with delicacy.” Montero humanized fighters like de Alva, and these men asserted that fighting was a science requiring dedication and grace.⁸⁵ Masculinity, then, was complicated, as traits associated with women—elegance, grace, and delicacy—were integral part of the wrestlers’ lives, all of whom sported athletic bodies that followed the demands of physical culture.

Lucha libre began in Mexico in 1933 when promoter Salvador Lutteroth brought wrestlers from Texas to Mexico; from the mid-1930s on, it became a “fixture in working- and lower-class neighborhoods of the capital and many other cities in the center and north of the

⁸³ “En honor del C. Adolfo Ruíz Cortínez,” *El Nacional*, June 21, 1952, sec. 2, 3.

⁸⁴ Emilio García Riera, *Historia documental del cine mexicano*, vol. 5 (Mexico, D.F.: Ediciones Era, 1973), 60.

⁸⁵ Manuel E. Montero, “Luchadores...en la lucha por la vida,” *Jueves de Excelsior*, January 30, 1941.

country.”⁸⁶ It would rapidly grow in its appeal. Individuals across the social spectrum took in bouts. Not surprisingly, Salvador Novo, who found working-class men attractive, attended them in the 1940s, even writing a piece entitled “Mi lucha (libre)” in which he described the festive atmosphere of the fights and how they blurred the lines between spectator and luchador.⁸⁷

The first *exótico*, like the sport itself, was not Mexican. He was Sterling Blake Davis, nicknamed “Dizzy” in the States and “Gardenia” in Texas and Mexico due to his penchant for tossing gardenias into the crowds during the match. He had a number of important bouts in the 1940s and 1950s in Mexico and influenced later stars like Lalo el Exótico. What made the men popular was that they offered an alternative type of masculinity, one that blended elegance and athletic prowess together with ambiguous sexuality. In other words, they were emblems of converging ideas on what masculinity was and how it would be recognized:

They were an odd lot, but not because of their short or overbuilt stature. Indeed, these dandified gladiators represented an alternative path for those Mexicans entering the ropes free of hang-ups about their sexual preferences and willing to take on the homophobic—or secretly, homophobic—leanings of wrestling fans.⁸⁸

Thus, they were those who recognized the opportunity that the ring and spectacle could provide, as well as the space that existed for sexual ambiguity, even at time of heightened homophobia at society at large. These men were examples—if also stereotypes—of the elegant gentlemen, of a type of masculinity that confounded how masculinity touted as “authentic” was to look. They also were successful and powerful as judged under the same rubrics as the men they fought against, as they often won due to their athleticism. Their campy performances belied their skills.

⁸⁶ Heather Levi, “The Mask of the Luchador: Wrestling, Politics, and Identity in Mexico,” in *Steel Chair to the Head: The Pleasure and Pain of Professional Wrestling*, ed. Nicholas Sammond (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 97-98.

⁸⁷ Heather Levi, “Masked Media: The Adventures of Lucha Libre on the Small Screen,” in *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940*, ed. Gilbert Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, and Eric Zolov (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001), 334-335. Novo’s piece is found in *Mexico en el Período de Lázaro Cárdenas* (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para Cultura y las Artes, 1994), 600.

⁸⁸ *Espectacular de lucha libre* (Mexico, D.F.: Trilce Ediciones, 2008), 38. Rumor has it that Davis was bisexual. He did have children, and Gorgeous George apparently learned his skills from Davis, who was his friend.

Lucha libre appeared on television between 1950-1954. However, during the *sexenio* of Ruiz Cortines and the reign of Ernesto Uruchurtu in Mexico City, the broadcasts were banned in 1954 as part of the larger moralization campaigns underway in the nation.⁸⁹ “The campaign to control lucha libre, however, sought to protect little boys from physical dangers.”⁹⁰ Given the outcry against Lalo el Exótico, those dangers consisted of more than boys getting hurt trying to imitate the moves the wrestlers made; imitating an *exótico* undermined efforts to produce the approved version of masculinity in youths. *Lucha libre* would only reappear on television in the early 1990s.⁹¹ Performers like Gardenia Davis and Lalo el Exótico had been dandies, having valets who attended to them in the ring and sprayed cologne on the mats before a match.⁹² Later generations would torment their opponents with “kisses and flirtatious gestures”—this was the shtick of Rudy Reynosa—and some were even openly gay, such as May Flowers and Pimperlana Escarlata. By that point, the “Exóticos changed the *exótico* style from a representation of a tendency to a representation of a social category and celebrated lucha libre as a means of upward mobility for themselves specifically as homosexuals.”⁹³

At their core, then, the *exóticos* challenged a unitary vision of masculinity that was oppositional to elegance or conspicuous consumption. They inserted this alternative masculinity into one of the most popular sports in Mexico and over time introduced sexual diversity there as

⁸⁹ José Agustín, *Tragicomedia mexicana 1: La vida en México de 1940 a 1970* (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Planeta Mexicana, 1990), 105.

⁹⁰ Levi, “Masked Media,” 340.

⁹¹ Anthropologist Heather Levi has argued that because the sport developed for a live, rather than televised, audience, it developed its own unique styles very distinct from that of professional wrestling in other nations. *Ibid.*, 330-372, especially 343. By the time it again appeared on TV, the *lila onda* (lilac wave) had already swept the sport, with *exóticos* firmly entrenched as a part of the sport.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 357. As Levi noted, the wrestlers contemporary was Gorgeous George in the United States.

⁹³ Heather Levi, *The World of Lucha Libre: Secrets, Revelations, and Mexican National Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 153-155. Echoing Ray de Alva decades later, *exótico* Sergio el Hermoso would state that *exóticos* were tough, but elegant” and they were those who “put the class in the lucha and condemn these other wrestlers who get into the ring without bathing first or putting on perfume. The lucha is a holy order and, like priests form the most beautiful temples, we keep our bodies and souls in their cleanest state when we practice.”

well. That the men were campy was not their most important characteristic, as they also were frequently victorious in their bouts, flouting the notion that simply by being “effeminate” in appearance or tastes that they would be weak. And their continued participation in sports points to their popularity and the ways in which physical culture could be appropriated in ways that destabilized sex/gender norms promoted by the nation.

If masculine athletic prowess could even be found in some dandy tossing flowers who invoked a legacy of negative discourses, (homo)phobias, and disgust for critics such as those who wrote to complain about Lalo el Exótico, what did that say about masculinity in general and attempts to define “real men” against such practices? We can wonder if at some level the spectacle of the *exótico* fighting in a ring with another man and vanquishing him resonated with fears that homosexual men really could be predators who could challenge masculine authority or convert another man, rather than only weak and despicable objects of scorn and the scapegoats of modernity’s failings. And we can speculate on what influence these men had on homosexuals, particularly of the popular classes, who saw campy behavior and sexual ambiguity incorporated into a larger cultural phenomenon that was central to Mexican identity by the mid-century.

III. Sexology, Criminology, and the State

During the 1940s and 1950s, there was an explosion of research on sexuality and criminology in the Mexican academy. In part, this was due to the maturing of the Mexican academy in these fields, but another major influence was the influx of Spanish Republican exiles who would participate in the founding of institutions of higher education like the Colegio de México, conduct research at Mexican universities, and publish their research in Mexican journals like

Criminalia, *Endocrinología*, and *Eugenesia*.⁹⁴ Once again, homosexuality figured prominently in these publications, with scholars divided over whether it was a “curable” illness, a social danger, a cause (or sign) of mental instability, or a crime.

Here is one representative example: in 1942, the Mexican journal *Endocrinología* published an article by Dr. Gonzalo R. Lafora entitled “Los tipos de homosexualidad y las hormonas sexuales” (“The Types of Homosexuality and Sexual Hormones”). Lafora was a noted neurologist, psychiatrist, and Spanish expatriate who had been exiled to Mexico in 1938 due to the Spanish Civil War. In Mexico, he became a noted doctor at UNAM. Like other scholarly Spanish émigrés to Mexico, he brought with him an infusion of perspectives and a significant knowledge of the latest research in his field. Lafora applied that expertise in his article on homosexuality, summarizing the latest studies from the 1930s and early 1940s in a context of previous European and North American scholarship. He discussed two types of homosexuality: “hereditary homosexuality,” in which genetics played a key role and homosexuality was an “intersexual” state, and “individual endogenous homosexuality”, in which homosexuality emerged entirely in the individual from birth, without genetic precursors and with unbalanced levels of sex hormones. A third section reported on the efforts underway to “treat” homosexuality, while a final section speculated on homosexuality as rooted in more complex endocrine processes that extended beyond the effects of the gonads.

Hemorrhoids, Homosexual Manias, and Jorge Cuesta

It is tempting to suggest that Lafora’s experience in Mexico had influenced his thinking on homosexuality, particularly given an encounter he had with writer, alchemist, and scientist Jorge

⁹⁴ El Colegio de Mexico began as la Casa de España, an institution founded during the end of Lázaro Cárdenas’s sexenio as the home for exiled Spanish intellectuals. In 1940 it was converted into El Colegio de Mexico and since 1961, the college has focused its attentions on the humanities and social sciences, being one of the most prestigious institutions in Mexico for these fields.

Cuesta in September 1940.⁹⁵ Cuesta, a member of the Contemporáneos, went to the doctor about various afflictions that had bothered him for years, particularly his ongoing problem with hemorrhoids that had been present since he was sixteen.⁹⁶ Cuesta was concerned that these were harbingers or markers of intersexuality, and he based this concern in part on the medical literature of the age that stated intersexual states left anatomical signs on the body. In other words, his fear of transforming into a woman stemmed in part from what he had learned about the potential mutability of the body, gender, sex, and sexuality, as discussed in endocrinology. Moreover, Cuesta worried that he had exacerbated the transformation through his alchemical experiments, many of which he tried out on himself.

Rather than taking Cuesta's concerns seriously and examining him physically, Lafora diagnosed him based solely on the answers Cuesta provided during his their encounter, concluding that he suffered from a "repressed homosexual inclination" that was "the cause of a mania or mental obsession."⁹⁷ It is not surprising that this was Lafora's diagnosis, given his specialties in psychoanalysis and his work on "psychic impotence."⁹⁸ And, Lafora may have been aware of not only Cuesta's membership in the Contemporáneos, a group ridiculed as being comprised by homosexuals, but also the denunciations made by his ex-wife Guadalupe Marín in her 1938 autobiographical novel *La única*.⁹⁹

Whatever the influences that led Lafora to his diagnosis, this was a distinctly unsatisfactory outcome from Cuesta's perspective. Cuesta refused to accept Lafora's diagnosis of mental

⁹⁵ Numerous scholars have written on Cuesta's "legend." See for example Irwin, *Mexican Masculinities*; Salvador A Oropesa, *The Contemporáneos Group Rewriting Mexico in the Thirties and Forties*, 1st ed. (Austin, Tex: University of Texas, 2003).

⁹⁶ Cuesta also was afflicted with migraines.

⁹⁷ Jorge Cuesta, "Carta al doctor Lafora," *Vuelta* (May 1977).

⁹⁸ Richard Cleminson and Francisco Vázquez García, *'Los Invisibles': A History of Male Homosexuality in Spain, 1850-1939* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), 79-81. Lafora may have been influenced by Freud.

⁹⁹ Guadalupe Marín, *La única* (Mexico: Editorial Jalisco, 1938).

instability on the basis of a verbal, rather than visual, exchange, and he based his critique on his knowledge that intersexual states did exist. Wrote Cuesta,

I want to admit that the sole fact of thinking and expressing an absurdity might very well be the manifestation of a mental obsession, in the eyes of as expert a doctor as you. But I find, doctor, that this *absurdity* does not derive from *my* imagination. I am not the one who imagines that there are intersexual states, which manifest themselves *anatomically*.¹⁰⁰

Cuesta clearly expected more than an examination on the psychoanalyst's couch.

Yet, Cuesta's appeal to anatomical changes also may have condemned him in the eyes of the illustrious doctor, particularly given those "changes" appeared in the form of hemorrhoids. As described in Chapter 3, these were still considered "signs" of sodomy by some medical jurists and practioners in the period. As such, by admitting he had them, Cuesta was in fact offering evidence that could have been, and often was, read as confirmation of his sexual perversity, precisely that which in its repression (or unacknowledged expression) was contributing to his "mental obsession."

The Vogue for Sexology and Criminology

Between 1940 and 1960, several graduate-level theses were produced that dealt in some fashion with homosexuality. The authors of these scholarly works were often students of or influenced by the famous criminologists and medical jurists of the previous decades who had outlined the legal statutes and medical provisions under which *afeminados*, homosexuals, and other sexually-deviant men were judged, examined, condemned, and "reformed." These scholars' academic and professional comings-of-age occurred during a more conservative political period and helped enshrine ideas of homosexuals as deviants and criminals for another three decades.

¹⁰⁰ Cuesta, "Carta al doctor Lafora."

One representative example was the 1943 doctoral thesis “Endocrinología” by Manuel Octavio Suárez who spent more than a dozen pages addressing homosexuality, defining it as follows:

Homosexuality, as is known, is the tendency of the individual to have coitus (or at least its approximation) with [and] an affection or liking towards an individual of the same sex; every homosexual is necessarily abnormal, but he can be abnormal due to various functions.

In contrast to the two bodies of thought on homosexuality that Lafora summarized in his 1942 article, Suárez asserted that there were at least four “classes of homosexuality”

(*homosexualismo*) and types of homosexuals, including (1) “homosexuality from hereditary origin,” (2) “true” endocrine homosexuality (characterized by abnormal hormonal levels), (3) “social” homosexuality (caused by social conditions and socialization into and imitation of behaviors such as masturbation and linked to a homosexual’s “greater” propensity to delinquency), and (4) “occasional” homosexuality (due to conditions such as prisons).¹⁰¹

In reality, there was a fifth category of homosexuals that Suárez noted with great disgust: “depraved/debauched” (*vicioso*) homosexuals. These were not the same as individuals suffering from “abnormal” endocrine secretions; instead, they were those who practiced sodomy and pederasty, subjects that Suárez vehemently denied having an interest in during his treatise on endocrinology, because they were relevant to “another chapter in criminology.” And, in case it was not clear, he asserted that rather than dealing with sodomy and pederasty, “I am not going to dive into that filthy muck.”¹⁰²

Yet, only ten pages later, he dives into the “sludge” he so wanted to disassociate himself from, professing that “finally, we have to say a few words, although it is with repulsion, about the *invertidos*, *homosexuales*, *sodomitas*, or however you want to call them.” Such individuals

¹⁰¹ Manuel Octavio Suárez, “Endocrinología” (Doctorado en Ciencias Penales, Universidad de Jalapa-Enriquez, Departamento Universitario, 1943), 86-92.

¹⁰² Ibid., 87.

were not, as some had asserted, suffering from endocrine issues; instead, they were “individuals who in every case are within the penal terrain;” only there could they find their salvation. Thus, his text illuminated a key tension between whether or not homosexuals should—or could—be held accountable for their actions, i.e., whether homosexuality was an illness or a vice.

A variety of other works appeared thereafter. Social worker Hermelinda Gutiérrez H. De García Escamilla argued in her professional thesis *El hogar colectivo como tratamiento en la prevención y solución de la delincuencia infantil* (1945) that masturbation could lead to homosexuality. Her text described evaluations for youths, including those that ascertained “character”—with “strange gestures and movements” being concerning—and good “conduct.” Youths could be prevented from falling into homosexuality if proper steps were taken.¹⁰³ This contrasted with the view that homosexuality entailed permanent criminality for adults. In May 1948, authors Ignacio Márquez Rodiles and Marco Arturo Montero argued in *El Nacional* that the homosexuals incarcerated at Lecumberri penitentiary—“including the “famous ‘Anita’ of the homosexual wing”—were as irredeemable as savage murderers because they were a certain criminal “type.” In contrast, other prisoners were instead victims of their own deficient social background, as well as their ignorance in avoiding delinquency and exploitation. That was why, the authors argued, “culture was the light of hope” and the “alphabet was the instrument of liberation” for the majority of prisoners in Lecumberri; in the official view, homosexuals were not afforded such hopes.¹⁰⁴ Crime figured in another 1945 thesis that derided the street as a source of contamination and warned about youths having access to “obscene literature” or the

¹⁰³ Hermelinda Gutiérrez H. De García Escamilla, “El hogar colectivo como tratamiento en la prevención y solución de la delincuencia infantil” (Tesis Profesional, UNAM, 1945), 34-43.

¹⁰⁴ “El alfabeto, instrumento de liberación de los reclusos,” *El Nacional*, May 13, 1948, sec. 2, 1.

cinema, which would lead them to vice.¹⁰⁵ And in 1950, a large work appeared that again linked homosexuality to endocrine abnormalities and crime.¹⁰⁶

Other works built on stereotypes that had circulated as science in the previous decades. An article in *Gaceta Medica de México* in December 1942 by dermatologist and medical doctor Fernando Latapi described a ten year-old boy acquiring syphilis disease through “passive” anal sex. The boy, originally from Uruapan, Michoacán, had a habit of running away from home, and after a two-month stint on the streets, he began exhibiting concerning signs. Despite repeated interviews and various attempts at ascertaining the cause, the boy only provided vague details of his experience, from wandering around one of the capital’s markets to spending his nights with a shoe-shiner (*bolero*) who was older than him. He declined to acknowledge if violence had been done to him or if he had participated openly in homosexual activities, which Latapi suspected. The doctor examined the boy, and found evidence to confirm his hypothesis: an infundibular anus that was “depressed” and that dilated easily, as well syphilitic lesions. Latapi concluded that even though he was aware that the first sign was not necessarily pathognomonic evidence of homosexuality for all medical jurists, that in combination with the other physical signs and social histories, it was the cause of the boy’s ailment. Soon after, he learned of another case of a boy contracting the condition through homosexual activity.¹⁰⁷

Latapi did not specify what the relationship between the boy and the bolero was, or if that was who was suspected in infecting the youth. The boy’s refusal to discuss the situation may have stemmed from shame at what had occurred, trauma from forced sex, or a reluctance to

¹⁰⁵ Sara Rodríguez Solís, “Etiología de la delincuencia infantil” (Licenciatura en Derecho, UNAM, 1945).

¹⁰⁶ Leopoldo Baeza y Acévez, *Endocrinología y criminalidad* (México: Universitaria, 1950).

¹⁰⁷ Fernando Latapi, “Sífilis adquirida en el niño,” *Gaceta Médica de Mexico: Organo de la Academia N. de Medicina* LXXII, no. 6 (December 1942): 563-564.

discuss his sexual activities on the street—his wandering in the markets, after all, put him into places where sexual commerce overlapped with that of mainstream society.

Seven years later, an unnamed author writing in the “Mensajes para los maestros” (Messages for Teachers) section of *El Nacional*, noted that “homosexuals pursue minors greatly, taking advantage of their innocence.” The author—likely a doctor, since he described parents bringing their youths to him for examination—discussed how he discovered youths with syphilitic lesions and *blenorragia* (gonorrhea). “Upon examining the homosexual one can observe rectal ulcerations with abundant secretions of pus.”¹⁰⁸ Homosexuals were thus carriers of physical infections *and* homosexuality itself that threatened to defile and corrupt youths. This is why teachers needed to be vigilant.

Criminal Slang, Handkerchiefs, Big Cats, and the Number 41

As part of emerging scholarship on homosexuality, researchers investigated the slang language , especially *caló*, the *argot* of prisoners and the criminal underworld. The precedent for this was Carlos Roumagnac who included a dictionary of slang in his *Los criminales en México* (1904). In 1937, Luis Vallejo reprised Roumagnac’s list in criminological journal *Criminalia*, updating it and making observations about what words were no longer in used. Several terms, though, remained in the vocabularies of those interviewed in prison. For example, *lumnio*, *lunio*, and *congrio* still served as terms for an *afeminado*; their feminine counterparts (*lumnia*, *lunia*, and *congria*) still described prostitutes.¹⁰⁹ The gender-parallel words make sense, given that both *afeminados* and prostitutes congregated in similar areas of the capital and other urban centers, and some of the former themselves engaged in sexual commerce. The words also suggest that

¹⁰⁸ “Epistolario para los maestros,” *El Nacional*, January 2, 1949.

¹⁰⁹ Carlos Roumagnac and Luis S. Vallejo, “Jerga o calo de los delincuentes en México,” *Criminalia* (January 1, 1937): 141.

other men saw both *afeminados* and prostitutes in a similar light, perhaps based on their perceived sexual availability and sexual “deviance” or perhaps based on the manner in which many *afeminados* adopted feminine personas. Both prostitutes and *afeminados*, then, were labeled as distinct from other men and women. Inmates also continued to use *mula* and *caballero* for passive pederast and *mayate* for active pederast.¹¹⁰

Four years later, on February 4, 1941, Dr. Alfredo M. Saavedra gave a presentation on Mexican *caló*, “the verbal modality typical of the professional delinquent, above all in the pornographic expression of sexual matters.”¹¹¹ Like other forms of argot, the slang used by Mexican delinquents and prison inmates included numerous words that were not a part of the mainstream vocabulary. This *caló* was also in circulation among the youth, and Saavedra warned that “among minors who begin to become delinquent is noted a certain tendency to assimilate that terminology that they intentionally or unconsciously hide and pretend to ignore.” Adults influenced youths through their language, turning them towards crime, because it was “a manner in which to begin controlling them as proselytes, starting by converting them into their accomplices through the same language.”¹¹²

¹¹⁰ “Annick Prieur’s interviews with homosexual men in the late twentieth century show that the latter term’s use—like other words associated with homosexuality—was very complicated. It is unclear if the term *mayate*, which observers seem to have exclusively situated with homosexual behavior earlier in the century, had gradually evolved to incorporate men who played the “active” role with other men, as well as women, or if this term was already used in nuanced ways earlier that were not reflected in the etymological studies conducted by criminologists. As she notes, the term was used in the 1990s by homosexual men to refer to their own partners. Nor do these studies necessarily account for regional differences, as scholars like Joseph Carrier, Stephan Murray, and Wayne Dynes present alternative definitions of the term distinct from those used in a popular-class suburb of DF. For Prieur’s dialogue with these scholars and their own observations, see Annick Prieur, *Mema’s House, Mexico City: On Transvestites, Queens, and Machos* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 24-27.; Joseph Carrier, *De los Otros: Intimacy and Homosexuality Among Mexican Men* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 12.; and Stephen O. Murray, *Latin American Male Homosexualities* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 180-192.

¹¹¹ Alfredo Saavedra, “El caló de la delincuencia y la expresión sexual,” *Anuario de la Sociedad Folklorica de México* II (January 1, 1941).

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 23.

Like the January 1941 cover in *Jueves de Excelsior*, Saavedra's talk demonstrated that even after nearly forty years, the significance of the Famous 41 and the number and term *cuarenta y uno* continued to be associated with homosexuality and male effeminacy. Interestingly, Saavedra associated the term with the *caló* of delinquents, even though it was a term that circulated in general society among the non-delinquent classes, as the examples from *Jueves de Excelsior* demonstrate. Perhaps this was Saavedra's way of undermining popular slang itself—at least in regards to homosexuality—as deviant.

Those that spoke the *caló* defined *cuarenta y uno* as the same as *afeminado* or “*huilo*”, a term literally meaning a scarf or handkerchief (*pañuelo*) that itself was slang for homosexuality. Many homosexuals, including several appearing in press photos, wore scarves and handkerchiefs as part of their ensemble, including on their heads, around their necks, and jauntily in their suit pockets; the term likely was derived from how these men looked. This definition may have just been emerging, since a contemporary *caló* glossary—found in Aguilar's *Los métodos criminales en México* (1941)—also defined *huilo* as *pañuelo*, but did so without the connotation of effeminacy or sexual inversion.¹¹³

Other terms circulated among the delinquents interviewed by the researchers, and, most likely, in the popular-class neighborhoods from which the majority of those incarcerated came included *leo*, which appeared in both Saavedra's presentation and Aguilar's book, and other related terms like *león* (lion) and *leopardo* (leopard). At least *leo* and *león* had feminine versions that referred to prostitutes. These may have originated in part from *leonero*, a masculinized form

¹¹³ José Raúl Aguilar, *Los métodos criminales en México: cómo defendernos* (Mexico, D.F.: Ediciones Lux, 1941). Deviations may also mark the sources or regions from which the terms came, as well as different sample pools from which to learn about usage. For example, Aguilar included terms in use when Roumagnac did his classic 1904 study, such as *mayate* and *caballo*, but these are not found in Saavedra's piece. *Mayate* was still being used, though, in the 1940s, as a letter from the Liga Nacional Contra los Homosexuales attests in October 1942.

of *leonera* (“lion’s den;” also, “pigsty”): a “room or habitation for amorous encounters.”¹¹⁴

Presumably one could find both *leonas* (female prostitutes) and *leones* (male *afeminados*) there.¹¹⁵

If one was labeled as *retrocede*, it signified being an *afeminado* as well. The term derived from the verb *retroceder*, meaning “to go back,” “to withdraw or retreat,” or “to stop oneself in the face of a danger or obstacle.” Such meanings also mapped well, whether intended or not, on discursive understandings of homosexuality during the 1940s; homosexuality, as an intersexual state, pseudo-sin, and even betrayal of masculinity was a form of cowardly regression, rather than moving forward or “straight.”

What is not clear is the extent to which this slang circulated and if such terms were used by *afeminados* themselves. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that some did, considering that many homosexual men were incarcerated for periods of time around others for whom the language was a normal dialect. Saavedra himself noted that the study of *caló* was an “obliged preamble” to understanding popular expressions of sexuality, because the slang had points of contact with such expressions.

Fifteen years after Saavedra’s presentation and the publication of Aguilar’s *Los métodos criminales*, Carlos Chabat’s *Diccionario de caló: el lenguaje del hampa en México* was published. The 1956 text, written by the Director of the Academia de Policía, included several of the terms in circulation in the previous decade, as well as others not mentioned by either Aguilar or Saavedra. Among the terms for *afeminado* were: *cafiaspirino*, *canco*, *cimmarón*, *coatatón*, *coliflor*, *congrío*, *cundango*, *jaño con jareta*, *jogrio*, *jotarás*, *joto*, *joven*, *leo*, *león*, *leopardo*,

¹¹⁴ The term continues having this meaning, as the online version of the Real Academia Española’s *Diccionario de la lengua española* defines it, in the Mexican sense, as a “house where binge parties or orgies are celebrated.”

¹¹⁵ Saavedra, “El caló de la delincuencia y la expresión sexual,” 28.

lépero, lumnio, ninfo, pastilla, pujiro, quebrachón, sarasa, and wilfrido. Some of these terms are not clear as to their origin or reference, but others had alternative meanings in mainstream vernacular. *Coliflor*, which literally means “cauliflower,” was related to *cola* and *colita*, i.e. one’s “tail” or butt. A *comadre* was literally a godmother, but also was a woman who gossiped and told secrets; this referenced the idea that *afeminados* possessed similar “feminine” traits and loose tongues, something thought since at least the turn-of-the-century. A *cimmarón* was something “wild” or a “wild animal;” it also originally referred to slaves who escaped captivity. *Cafiaspirino* was an aspirin, and *pastilla* was a pill. The inclusion of *ninfa* may offer evidence of the impact of the character Chucho el ninfa on popular understandings of gender and sexuality. Separate terms existed for *invertido*—*taralaila*; *pederasta pasivo*—*mula, caballo*; and *pederasta activo*—*mayate*.

Green with Homosexuality

Discourses on sexuality and criminology overlapped with those detailing the norms of fashion, masculinity, and appearance. One of the most innovative—and bizarre—studies to be produced in the 1940s was *Teoría del color verde* (1944) by the highly decorated scholar and medical jurist Dr. Gustavo Rodríguez.¹¹⁶ Employing a color scheme described by French physician Charles Féré in *Sensation et mouvement: études expérimentales de psychomécanique* (1887), Rodríguez described a spectrum of colors in which red and orange were the colors of men, blue and yellow those of women, and green that of “intersexuals,” who were predisposed to the color because they were *nerviosos* and psychopaths.¹¹⁷ As evidence, he cited Havelock Ellis and John

¹¹⁶ Three years after its publication, *Jueves de Excelsior* would give it a positive evaluation.

¹¹⁷ Gustavo A. Rodríguez, *Teoría del color verde* (Xalapa, Veracruz, 1944), 13. The term *nerviosos*—literally “nervous ones”—refers sort of neuroticism, psychopathology, and possibly the “male hysteria” described by historian Mark Micale, given that Mexican scholars, including Rodríguez, were reading and applying an eclectic

Addington Symonds' *Sexual Inversion* (1897), in which they noted that green had been associated with homosexuality since the Roman Empire and remained popular among the men that were interviewed as part of their study.¹¹⁸

Rodríguez's theory of the color green had its origins in a debate published in *Revista de Revistas* in 1934 on whether or not Hernán Cortés—the Spanish conquistador—was a geographer. Rodríguez and others from the Sociedad de Geografía y Estadística wrote an article (published August 19, 1934) asserting that no, Cortés and his men were not geographers. Beyond disagreement on this point, the authors stated in a note that among the things the conquistadors did profess to be fans of was the color green. As can be imagined, this generated a response some weeks later that stated it was not true that green pleased *invertidos* and that “there does not exist a historical source that sustains that pederasty affected anyone among the conquistadors, while there are those that maintain the aborigines had it.” The exchange may have reflected a larger tension in Mexican society: was Mexico the product of the conquistadors and their European lineages or that of the indigenous civilizations that had become the focal point of *indigenismo*? Thus Rodríguez and his colleagues took on the task of discovering the truth, publishing another article in July 1935 that stated Lerma, one of Cortés's companions, was indeed an *invertido*. They followed this with another on January 5, 1936 that claimed that Robespierre and Nero were both fans of the color green and both were pederasts. What followed in Rodríguez's text was a collection of citations and arguments woven together to support the association of psychopathology, homosexuality, and the color green.

array of European and American texts to their theories on homosexuality. On male hysteria, see Mark S Micale, *Hysterical Men: the Hidden History of Male Nervous Illness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008).

¹¹⁸ Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds, *Sexual Inversion* (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis Company, 1908), 177.

In addition, one of Rodríguez's acquaintances named Bonifacio (the penname of journalist Luis Fregoso Rojas) sought to prove his theory, at least anecdotally. He learned from a fellow journalist named Lunagómez that the latter had seen homosexual men have inclinations to the color green. On one occasion in Jalapa, he saw a man dressed entirely in green from head to toe. And when Lunagómez commented on how spiffy the man looked, the other approached him like he was a potential mate, an action that drove the journalist away but helped substantiate, in Bonifacio's eyes, Rodríguez's theory.¹¹⁹

Contagion and "Cures"

Yet, the significant attention given homosexuality in medical and criminological investigations was in part due to an interest among some scholars in reforming homosexuals who degenerated due to social or environmental causes, as well as a desire to cure those who were congenitally "cursed," in the view of experts, with hormonal or other imbalances that led to homosexuality. A variety of approaches were tried for youths and adults alike by specialists associated with the medical-criminological system, as well as doctors in private practice. It was not uncommon for advertisements to appear in major newspapers promoting cures for a variety of ailments, including homosexuality. Several appeared on October 31, 1946 offering cures for everything from stomach ailments and ulcers to liver problems, hernias, skin diseases and more.¹²⁰ At least three of the ads offered solutions for sexual problems and "disabilities," including impotence, prostatitis, and sterility. Two offered solutions for venereal diseases, including gonorrhea and syphilis. "We Cure Your Illness," promised the Clínica Génito-Urinaria at the corner of

¹¹⁹ See Bonifacio, "Verde," in *Teoría del color verde* by Gustavo R. Rodríguez (Xalapa, Veracruz, 1944), 35-39.

¹²⁰ The juxtaposition of the medical ads with others on the page is rather quite striking; the entire bottom two-thirds of the page is comprised of advertisements for fine suits from Palacio de Hierro and fine Spanish wines, to others advertising rum, cars, business opportunities, toys, and get-away vacations. A man could reinvent himself—or be reinvented by another—just by consuming the items offered on the page.

Ayuntamiento and San Juan de Letrán, “using the most modern methods”, including solving hemorrhoids and rectal fistulas without invasive surgery, which likely appealed to men, queer or otherwise, suffering from such conditions.¹²¹ Another advertisement, this time for the Clínicas Médicas Centrales, promised the reader that if he used the proper tonic—as guided by the ample experience of the doctors at the clinics—he could be rejuvenated or cured of any number of sexual issues. Among these were “sexual perversions” including masturbation and homosexuality.¹²² At least in the case of the doctors advertising in *El Universal*, everyone could be possibly cured and was worth a consultation.

Reports and rumors that Mexico was a site for sex-reassignment surgeries were circulating in the United State by the late 1940s (if not before). On February 19, 1953, US doctor Henry Weyrauch wrote to Dr. Manuel E. Pesqueira in Mexico City seeking information about sex-change operations. “A few years ago I saw a male patient who desired to have his external genitalia removed in order that he might become a woman,” wrote Weyrauch, who then refused to operate on the man. “I learned that subsequently he went to Mexico City and had the operation performed.”¹²³ At the time of his letter, Weyrauch found himself in the same position again: another patient, named Clair Elgin, who sought a similar operation after hearing of the celebrated sex-change operation of former US Army soldier Christine Jorgensen in Denmark.¹²⁴

¹²¹ “Curamos su enfermedad,” *El Universal*, October 31, 1946, sec. 1, 2.

¹²² “El tratamiento actual de rejuvenecimiento y tonificación,” *El Universal*, October 31, 1946, sec. 1, 2. We can only wonder what sorts of evaluations and questionnaires the men filled out to receive these treatments; should some exist in an unknown archive, such as a doctor’s personal records, they would be a treasure trove of information on sexual practices in Mexico during the period. Ads like these, which can be found earlier in the century as well, would continue appearing throughout the period. See for example “Solo curo hombres,” *Excelsior*, October 11, 1942, 4 in which one Dr. Raschbaum treated sexual debilities with “glandular therapy,” and the ad “Debilidad sexual y enfermedades secretas,” *Excelsior*, April 29, 1947, 4, which included sexual perversions under conditions treated.

¹²³ “Weyrauch to Pesqueira,” February 19, 1953, Caja 11, exp. 3, SSA/SUBA, SALUD.

¹²⁴ Born George William Jorgensen, Christine Jorgensen transitioned through hormonal therapies and surgeries in Fall 1952; although not the first such surgery, Jorgensen’s made a splash in the world media. See Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard

Weyrauch did receive a response; however, Pesqueira responded that “so far as I know, no such operation has been performed in any of our hospitals in Mexico,” and he expressed regret he could not assist Weyrauch further.¹²⁵ Perhaps the Mexican doctor was unaware of such operations occurring in Mexico, or perhaps he sought to distance himself from their practice, much as Weyrauch had himself a few years earlier, particularly as reports of Jorgensen’s transition and other “changes of sex” appeared in the mainstream Mexican press in the fall and winter months of 1952.¹²⁶

What is interesting is that in publishing articles about foreign sex-changes, newspapers like *El Nacional* and *El Universal* did not comment on previous sex-change operations in Mexico. Perhaps they, like Pesqueira, were unaware the operations or unwilling to publicly discuss them. Nevertheless, such operations had already occurred within the country. An early example was that of Juana Bonilla who gained notoriety in the capital for a sex-change operation in 1937. Popular magazine *Sucesos para todos* reported on Bonilla’s transition to Juan, musing that “if these operations can be practiced on whichever woman or vice versa...such work the surgeons would have!” that is, there would be many who would seek such operations in the opinion of the magazine.¹²⁷ Over a decade later in April 1951, the column “De Plaza de Armas a la Avenida de Armas” reported in Veracruz’s *El Dictamen* newspaper that the “news of the week was the birth of a young man at the age of 22 years!” Previously the young man “had been a woman” and his new “birth” was the result of a “change of sex through a surgical operation” in a

University Press, 2002). In Mexico, an early report appeared from the United Press International wire in December 1952. See “La transformación del hijo del un carpintero de Bronx en una ‘atractiva mujer natural’ es descrita,” *El Nacional*, December 3, 1952, sec. 2, 1.

¹²⁵ “Manuel E. Pesqueira to Weyrauch,” March 13, 1953, Caja 11, exp. 3 SSA, SUBA, SALUD.

¹²⁶ One type of “sex-change” that did not involve surgery, but that was reported in the Mexican press, was that of Scottish medical doctor Ewan Forbes (originally Elizabeth Forbes-Sempill) and his “change of sex” through the legal means or re-registering his birth as male. See Esteban Salazar Chapela, “Cambio de sexo,” *El Nacional*, September 29, 1952, 3; a second article ran on October 8, 1952 about Forbes’s impending marriage.

¹²⁷ “Cambio de sexo,” *Sucesos para todos*, October 19, 1937, 2.

military hospital by doctor Joaquin Corres Calderón.¹²⁸ In both cases, young women had transitioned through surgical means to become men, and these examples—both of which occurred before Weyrauch’s letter—demonstrate that sex-reassignment procedures were not only occurring in Mexico, but were reported upon in the press.¹²⁹

Men would also have surgeries. Starting in 1953 and completing in 1954, Dr. Rafael Sandoval Camacho and his colleagues conducted a series of operations on a man named Jorge, and he would publish his work in *Una contribución experimental al estudio de la homosexualidad* (1957).¹³⁰ Camacho was well-read on the subject of homosexuality, both in historical terms and in scientific terms. In his second chapter, he detailed a diverse set of perspectives, citing Germans Westphal, Hirschfeld, Ulrich, Moll; Italian criminologist Lombroso; French scholars Charcot and Magnan; Austrians Krafft-Ebing, Freud; British physician/psychologist Havelock Ellis; and Swiss sexologist Forel, among others. He also had read Donald Webster Cory’s *The Homosexual in America* (1950, published in Spanish 1952), which had questioned if homosexuality could actually be—or should be—“cured.” Camacho’s response was that it could be cured, contrary to Cory’s argument—even as the doctor considered Cory’s perspective as a homosexual valuable. Camacho asserted that the reason it had been assumed that homosexuality could not be effectively cured was that psychoanalysis and related therapies left an “implicit antagonism between the psychic and the somatic” aspects of the body

¹²⁸ At this time, more details of the case are not apparent. But this does mark an example of a woman seeking to transition into status of a man in terms of physical anatomy, not just through gendered performances such as those by Amelio Robles, a famous Mexican revolutionary soldier who began his life as a woman (but changed his gender status through his actions and social networks, rather than surgery). See Gabriela Cano, “Unconcealable Realities of Desire: Amelio Robles’s (Transgender) Masculinity in the Mexican Revolution,” in *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico*, ed. Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Gabriela Cano (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 35-56.

¹²⁹ It is possible that the overall lack of sustained response to these surgeries was due to the individuals being women, as women who assumed more masculine roles actually reinforced patriarchy and machismo; in other words, women transitioning was not as sensational as men transitioning.

¹³⁰ In the text, his name is given as “J. O. B.,” however photos preserved in the AGN show his first name to be Jorge.

that could not be resolved. Nor were there sufficient specialists that could carry out psychoanalysis, which was a laborious and time-consuming process. Instead, they needed to be more fully aligned to enhance an individual's well-being and to permit "their reintegration into society, with their physical appearance corresponding with their comportment."¹³¹ The solution was thus to merge psychiatric treatments with hormonal and surgical treatments, and Jorge was a prime candidate for the method because both psychotherapy and hormonal therapies had failed to provide favorable results in his case.

At his first consultation in November 1952, Jorge was twenty-one years old, from Veracruz, and a commercial employee in commerce. When interviewed, he described how as a child he had preferred the company of girls, had played with dolls, and had played games like he was a mother or serving/making food. At school, he was "marked as effeminate" and campy. During his adolescence, he had "imitated the mannerisms and habits of his sisters, occupied himself in domestic labors in which he found pleasure in the creation of menus, [and] he saw to washing, ironing, and sewing his brothers clothing." At age 13, he had his first homosexual encounter with a "masculine, tall, well-built, good-looking" partner with whom he felt "protected" and who "provoked a feeling of voluptuousness" that Jorge enjoyed. Thus he sought out similar men for sex, repeating them twice a week.

As part of his preoperative evaluations, doctors gave Jorge physical/anthropometric examinations, blood tests, intelligence tests (Binet-Simon, Raven), a Rorschach psychodiagnostic, a Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), and a Szondi test. These all led to his diagnosis as a homosexual—surprise, surprise—and included a number of observations that were taken as evidence of his pathology. His pubic hair, for example, was diamond-shaped, although

¹³¹ Rafael Sandoval Camacho, *Una contribución experimental al estudio de la homosexualidad* (Mexico, D.F., 1957), 31-32. There is no publisher listed either in the book or in the metadata found in library catalogues.

most pronounced in the lower triangle (a trait considered feminine.)¹³² He also possessed an infundibular anus, which the doctors took as proceeding from his interest in playing the passive role in anal sex.¹³³ His Rorschach test revealed that he had “sexual complexes” that caused insecurity and aggression towards society, while his Szondi test revealed both “feminine sexual tendencies accompanied by the necessity of constituting himself as a receptacle of love and an intense desire of receiving tenderness,” as well as “hysteria.” The results were “conscious and unconscious opposition to the contradiction between his physical appearance and psychological processes of a feminine character,” as well as a diagnosis of “intersexual syndrome” of the homosexual variety associated with feminine mannerisms, habits, and libido. Finally, his “strong depressive and hysterical states” had led him to consider self-abuse and suicide.

For Camacho, there were two types of homosexuals: those that wanted to be “cured” and those that expressed pride and happiness in their sexuality. He dismissed both attitudes as “defense mechanisms,” with the first group fighting to preserve their self-worth, with their self-reproach freeing them to act as they wanted, while the second group suffered “shame and remorse” and used “boastfulness” to deflect against society’s judgments. In other words, homosexuality remained an abnormality and pathology for the doctor, and he undermined it as a legitimate state of being, thus necessitating a more permanent solution.

With the successful end of the surgeries, Jorge was provided with further hormonal and psychiatric treatments to help him adjust to his new feminine status within Mexican society. Follow-up examinations—including the same tests given to him before—showed he was adjusting well, had achieved some manner of self-affirmation and rectification of his previous

¹³² The idea that there were “feminine” and “masculine” hair distribution may have stemmed from Marañón’s works. James Green has described similar examinations of homosexuals conducted in Brazil by

¹³³ His genitalia, in contrast, were “normal” in size.

problems, and that his inclinations now had a positive outlet for their expression. In other words, he had successfully been heteronormativized, which was the ultimate goal of Camacho's procedure, even as it seems the doctor had some sympathy for his patient and believed his procedure was a necessary help for those in need. Indeed, since Jorge had let himself be "opened" by another man, his transition—or was it restitution?—to a feminine status stabilized the "natural" order. Camacho's surgeries, then, were the medical, material outgrowth of Paz's argument. Photos of Jorge in the book and in the AGN's Fototeca corroborated this process, showing him in women's clothing and in domestic spaces as a woman. The difference, then, was that his anatomy now "matched" his appearance and inclinations, rather than him just being another *afeminado* in drag. And, his transition and assumption of a new name—Marta—made headlines in 1954, such as in *ABC* magazine.¹³⁴

Camacho recommended that his approach be applied to others in similar situations as Marta had been. Mexico's reputation as a site for such surgeries would continue to grow, and during the 1950s and beyond, several US Americans who could not find or afford surgeries at home turned there for help. These included, according to Joanne Meyerowitz's groundbreaking *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (2002), the gay female impersonator Ray Bourbon, who had an operation in Ciudad Juarez; two others were Debbie Mayne and Carla Sawyer, both patients of the noted advocate for and doctor of US American transsexuals Harry Benjamin.¹³⁵ Similarly, Mexico offered a space for foreigners to try out their non-normative identities, whether they challenged gender norms or those of sexuality. Around the same time of Weyerauch and Pesqueira's epistolary exchange, US American Caren Ecker

¹³⁴ I have not been able to locate this article as of the writing of this chapter. However, I have a photograph of Jorge/Marta reading the the article in the newspaper with his sister that was found in the AGN's Fototeca.

¹³⁵ Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 86, 147, 187. In his own work on the subject, *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (1966), Benjamin listed Mexico as one option among others in Europe and Japan that would continue to attract those interested in surgery in the 1960s.

(pseudonym) was living in Mexico City as a woman, but the experiment ended at the hands of a “pawing drunk.” Ecker was one of many expatriates, a large number of them from the United States, who lived in the city. Such possibilities were facilitated in large part due to Mexican governmental support for the country’s burgeoning tourist industry and the appeal of the Mexico City College to post-WWII veterans eager to make the most of their GI Bill benefits.¹³⁶

IV: Homosexuality, Foreignness, and Citizenship in *Sodoma Pide Fuero* and the Casasola Murders

Despite Camacho’s “solution,” homosexuality remained a threat at the end of the 1950s. It is fitting, then, to end this section with two examples from 1959 that demonstrate the continued convergence of national and transnational spheres with homosexuality around the issues of citizenship. I begin with the book *Sodoma pide fuero*, which tied together nationalism, anti-imperialism, and homophobia and conclude with a brief discussion of the infamous Casasola murder case that spawned some of the most draconian roundups of homosexuals and closures of their social sites during the century. In each example, homosexuality was posited as something anti-Mexican and a threat to the nation; it was something foreign and dangerous that had to be purged from public spaces, from positions of power, and even from social organizations.

Nationalism, Regionalism, and Homophobia in Sodoma pide fuero

If there was one work during the first sixty years of the twentieth century that most stridently linked nationalism, pan-regionalism, homophobia, Catholic dogma, xenophobia, and anti-imperialism together—all with a smattering of science and religious dogma thrown in—it was *Sodoma pide fuero*, published in 1959. The work was a reaction to the publication of Donald Webster Cory’s *The Homosexual in America*, which was a major work in the history of the gay

¹³⁶ Infamously, writer William Burroughs shot his wife Joan Vollmer in 1951 in the city, as well as explored his homosexual tendencies, which were to feature in his novels *Queer* and *Junky*.

rights movement in the United States.¹³⁷ Cory claimed that homosexuals constituted an “unrecognized minority” that deserved status like other minorities (such as African Americans and Jews) and that homosexuality was involuntary and as “ineradicable as if it involved the color of one’s skin or the shape of one’s eyes.”¹³⁸

In Spanish translations the title had been changed to *El homosexual en Norteamérica*. This change—from “America” to “North America”—was an important one, because it invoked decades of Pan-Latin American rhetoric that rejected the United States as the sole owner of the term “America.” Consider, for example, the rhetoric employed by José Martí, the “father” of the Cuban nation, in his polemical “Nuestra America” that was published in *El Partido Liberal*, a Mexico City newspaper, in 1891. Martí skillfully deployed “Our America” as referring to the republics south of the Río Grande in contrast to “North America,” i.e., the United States. Juan José Arévalo, a former president of Guatemala, made a similar distinction in his *The Shark and the Sardines* (first published in 1956), a text that critiqued US American interventions in Latin America.¹³⁹ All, however, asserted a larger definition of “America” as not limited to the US. *Sodoma pide fuero* built on these notions stating that Cory’s “obscene text” had “slandered twenty nations by not being attentive to the distinctions of what “America” really meant, as his title suggested that all the nations were implicated, even if his text did not.

Moreover, authors F. Ferrer Torrents and Joan D’Oc asserted that while these nations had “grave problems,” they nevertheless did not face the problem that the United States did with homosexuality. “Is a nation with twenty million homosexuals respectable?” they asked. This they based on Cory’s section “Is Our Number Legion?” which dealt with the troubles of counting the

¹³⁷ Cory was the penname of Edward Sagarin, an American professor of sociology and criminology at the City University of New York. He would go on to write several other books on homosexuality in succeeding years.

¹³⁸ Donald Webster Cory, *The Homosexual in America: A Subjective Approach* (New York: Greenburg: Publisher, 1951), 4-5.

¹³⁹ The immediate reference point was the CIA-backed coup in Guatemala in 1954.

number of homosexuals in the United States; to emphasize their point, they used Cory's musings that "one out of five, or ten, or even twenty" individuals were homosexual.¹⁴⁰ Their answer was a clear "no:" "a country that has, or there are clear indications that it may have, over twenty million homosexuals, is a country lost if a rectifying behavior does not save it from sure shipwreck." Indeed, they asserted that the United States was destined to decline like Ancient Rome had. Such claims show how over a century after the articles described in Chapter 1, the legacy of ancient decadence and decline as related to abnormal gender and sexuality continued to have meaning.

Indeed, no other country in the world had the same social problem with homosexuality as the United States; this claim deterritorialized the homosexual "problem" in Mexico and placed it squarely in the realm of the American empire, Mexico's most prominent historical nemesis.¹⁴¹ What followed in the book was a hodgepodge of religious history and dogma—with references to the anti-sodomy sections of the Bible—arm-chair psychoanalysis, and sections that cherry-picked scientific literature. For example, the authors rejected theories of "bisexuality"—which appear to be similar to Marañón's theory of intersexuality—saying that it was "hard to believe" that there was a repressed homosexual inside every heterosexual.

In another section, they enumerated the "causes" of homosexuality. These included 1. an intense incestuous love for the mother that caused men to flee from other women; 2. an intense love for the father and jealousy of the mother, which led to homosexuals seeking out surrogate fathers in their lovers; 3. "love and identification" with the mother and a desire to be her; 4.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 91.

¹⁴¹ Blaming empire or the West for homosexuality was not something in which the authors were alone; Franz Fanon stated in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) that there was no homosexuality in Martinique, while in Europe there was "neurotic homosexuality" and Martinicans who went there "became homosexuals" as a means of securing a living by serving as passive partners to others there. And like Fanon, the authors saw racism and homosexuality as linked, asserting that true racial tolerance existed in Latin America, rather than the United States, which remained an "immature" nation that was like an "insolent son of a rich father."

hatred of a severe mother who had been oppressive and dominant, thus necessitating a “union” with a man who was a less dangerous;” 5. physical or spiritual absence of the mother in a child’s life and a desire to fill that absence with affection from the father, thus making the child identify as a woman; 6. poor sexual education that taught contact with women was something sinful and sex was dirty; 7. physical debilities that impeded boys from competing with other boys, which would lead a boy to identify with girls and to later in life flee before the “virile” man in the competition for women; 8. the desire to be protected by a strong being and thus, a desire to find a “seducer;” 9. obligated repetition of heterosexuality, as could be found in prostitutes who came to hate men; 10. a defense against a strong sadistic impulse, i.e. that because men feared committing horrible acts with women, they would turn subconsciously to homosexuality; 11. inadequate education from the parents in establishing gender norms; 12. deprivation of contact with the opposite sex, as found in single-sex environments; 13. hatred of a drunk and womanizing father; 14. a very dominant mother and a weak and dominated father, that would thus induce a boy to want to be a woman, and 15. homosexuality caused by contracting a disease or having a traumatic heterosexual experience, although many of those were caused by homosexual events in an individual’s childhood.¹⁴²

In other words, the authors threw everything and the kitchen sink into their list of the “causes” of homosexuality, blending a variety of perspectives together in a list that would only seem to leave a single path to heteronormativity: a strongly differentiated household in which there was only moderate contact with either parent and proper socialization. *Sodoma pide fuero* thus enumerated—literally—decades of debates on homosexuality by essentially asserting that

¹⁴² Ferrer Torrents and D'Oc, *Sodoma pide fuero*, 88-93.

all of the fears about improper socialization had been correct and that it was the social environment, more so than other influences, that determined one's sexuality.

Interestingly, it also had two perspectives that would seem almost progressive. Sex was not something considered a sin by the authors but something that should be engaged appropriately. And the authors also asserted that if an individual was an “authentic homosexual”—that is, one who was born that way and acted from impulses rather than from being induced or seduced into homosexuality—he should either admit that he was and to not do so was to be a “coward” who “lost his own self-esteem and self-respect,” or he should “challenge openly” his seducer through legal means.

In sum, *Sodoma pide fuero*, both a nationalist, homophobic diatribe and a harbinger of the “third-way” style politics that Mexico would embrace, i.e., that Mexico was a mature “leader” among nations in contrast to the United States. It was an anti-imperialist tome that rejected Mexico's position within Richard Burton's fabled Sotadic Zone by implicating the descendents of Northern Europe—the “North” Americans—as those overrun with the vice, rather than the Mediterraneans and Native Americans.¹⁴³ There was no Latino-American model of sexuality for the authors. Together, their critiques sought to label homosexuality as completely an imported problem that, when it occurred in Mexico, could be treated by finding its cause. Mexico was not just a nation that defined itself against homosexuality; it was a nation who could use homosexuality to define others as inferior nations.

¹⁴³ Chris White, ed., *Nineteenth-Century Writings on Homosexuality, A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1999), 145. An excerpt of Burton's Section D, “Pederasty” from the “Terminal Essay” in *The Thousand Nights and a Night*, 1885 mentions the Sotadic Zone that encompassed the Mediterranean, running east through the Middle East and northern India, then comprising China and Japan, the South Sea Islands, and the New World. For Burton, races located north and south of the line—which would include Northern Europeans, among others—practiced the vice only sparingly, but sodomy was common inside the zone. It's worth noting that the Iberian Peninsula was contained within the zone; this adds another dimension to the claims about Cortés raised in *Teoría del color verde*, as Spanish colonization would have been part of the “Mediterranean” world marked as home to sodomitic behavior.

The Casasola Murder Case

The following fall after *Sodoma pide fuero* was published, a shocking murder occurred that, like the scandal of 1901, would change the status of homosexuals within Mexican society significantly and like the discourses of the 1950s, highlight both the homophobia and xenophobia of the Mexican state. Fifty-five year-old Catalán millionaire Mercedes Casasola and her twenty-three year-old Italian bisexual lover Ycilio Massine were brutally murdered in Casasola's home on September 13; when examined, their bodies were covered in stab wounds. For weeks after the event, news of the murder plastered the press, with nearly daily articles describing new roundups of suspects or leads. Due to the case's high profile, it was turned over to the Servicio Secreto, the Distrito Federal's elite police (and the only police entity considered both efficient and not corrupt.)¹⁴⁴

From the start, authorities targeted homosexual men and foreigners (including Italians and an American named Gordon Reed), rounding up dozens of both. For days, a young man named Javier Nava Cortés was the prime suspect, and a nation-wide manhunt was initiated to find him. He turned himself in on September 18 in order to prove his innocence, and under interrogation, admitted that he "exploited" rich women and "pederasts," as well as "young men of strange habits that pay good money for his presence."¹⁴⁵ However, while he fit the model that police sought after being interrogated it was determined that he was in fact not the killer: Nava was not left-handed, as the killer was, nor did he have keys to get into Casasola's house.

Homosexuals remained top suspects, though, because of the "passionate" violence of the crime and Ycilio's own activities as a male prostitute. This necessitated a new round of arrests

¹⁴⁴ "Case No. N/522/18110: Mercedes Casasola y Ycillio Massine," 1959, AHDF, Jefatura de Policía, Investigación/Policia Secreta.

¹⁴⁵ "Se presentó a la policía F. Javier Nava y parece poder comprobar su inocencia," *El Nacional*, September 19, 1959, 10.

that would continue into 1960. Among these were numerous foreigners because a second lead that was heavily pursued was the connection of Casasola and Massine to the Frontón México, a site of Basque culture popular with both foreigners and the sexually adventurous. This foreign connection served as justification to round up numerous visitors and immigrants and to determine if they were “worthy” of remaining in Mexico.

As they investigated the crime, police learned a tremendous amount of information about the homosexual social world; each arrest and roundup resulted in new individuals to interrogate, and these were pressured to give names of other homosexuals that they knew. For example, while Nava was the prime suspect, police interrogated many of his friends and acquaintances, learning about sites where “individuals of strange habits” met each other. As a result, they had significant details on where to raid for homosexuals, as well as the names of homosexuals extracted from their colleagues. This information was put to good use, as Regent Uruchurtu ordered mass campaigns against sites of *ambiente*.

This case is too convoluted and the case file too large (over 300 pages) to engage here in greater detail. However, I want to end with a portion of the case that encapsulated the fears expressed towards homosexuality and foreignness, particularly as they could impact youth and Mexican citizenship. Included in the file was a letter, dated October 2, 1960 from a father of three young men, from sixteen to twenty-four, who said he was an employee of an “important company.” The father reported, with regret, that his youngest son was engaged with many other boys in a group dedicated to the exploitation of American homosexuals. This group, comprised of “inexpert children already perverted, the majority of them minors” targeted tourists and gained

entrance to bars such as the Pirata, Nigte-Há, Belvedere, Jena, Focolare, Quid, and that of the Hotel Paseo.¹⁴⁶

It is in these luxury places where homosexuals gather and soon make contact with a handsome young man, who speaks in most cases perfect English and are encountered having a drink at the bar. If an American is interested in a particular type of child or boy, this young man proposes the business at prices quite high.¹⁴⁷

From there the pair would head to a hotel room, or if the American lived in the city, back to his residence. This was a lucrative trade—the father reported that his son had 356 US dollars in his pant pocket, which had launched his investigation into his son’s activities. Upon being questioned, the youth said the money belonged to a young man named Tony. The father then “outs” the twenty-something Tony, saying that he was the ringleader pimp for the group of youths and giving an address he claimed was Tony’s to the police. What made the letter relevant, in the eyes of the father, was that he overheard Tony bragging to an American that he was involved in the Casasola case. Thus, he asked that there be an investigation into the man and others like him for their connection to the murders and that there be action taken against “the plague of scammers, perverters of minors, and [those] engaged in putting the name of our country into the ground” because “they are a disgrace to our society.”

Was this a legitimate letter offering evidence in a still-unsolved case? Or was this an instance of a father seeking vengeance against a man who had led his son into degradation? Either way, the letter offered further evidence of the connections between homosexuality and foreigners, as well as the existence of a homosexual sex-ring pimping future citizens to imperial tourists. And it gave ammunition to the vice campaigns that would continue into the 1960s.

¹⁴⁶ These bars existed in large part to service the desires of US tourists to have nightlife in Mexico City; these wanted to see their pyramids by day and drink their martinis by night.

¹⁴⁷ A father (name illegible), “Letter from Case File N/522/18110,” October 2, 1960, Departamento del Distrito Federal, Jefatura de Policía, Servicio Secreto, AHDF.

The parallels between the 1959 murders and the 1901 scandal may not be immediately apparent, but they are nevertheless striking. In both cases, there was a precipitating event that brought the homosexual social world into the public eye and under police scrutiny for an extended period of time. The press in both cases, through their feeding frenzy, amplified the story and made all sorts of accusations against homosexuals, most of which were unfounded. In both cases, homosexual men were detained by authorities on often dubious legal grounds. And both cases would have a lasting impact—with the Famous 41 leaving their mark on homosexuality for most of the century and the 1959 case and its treasure trove of information on the homosexual social world serving as a justification to effect an assault on that world that would result in the closure of numerous homosexual sites, increased vigilance on the part of authorities, and the end to the *ambiente*'s golden age even after it was learned that the homosexual community was not involved.

Conclusion

As these last two examples show—and they are two of many that could be used—the convergences between national concerns, homosexuality, and the transnational sphere had never been as intense as they were in the 1940s and 1950s, particularly in years like 1959. This period marked the high-water point theoretically—through works like that by Paz—and materially—through the exercise of state power—to remove homosexuality as a social problem, source of crime, and disease in Mexico. It also marked a period in which homosexuality was studied as never before, and one in which masculinity, despite being claimed by nationalists as their terrain, actually was largely determined by transnational processes, including those in which both mainstream and homosexual men participated. It should not be surprising, then, that foreignness and homosexuality were asserted as dangerous when cultural theorists, sexologists, the police,

and government agents all sought to define what was truly Mexican—maybe the youthful future citizen, maybe the *pelado*—versus what was “contaminated” from the outside. Yet, as the next section will show, the search for a Mexican icon would be undermined by the *ambiente* itself, as it grew and became a more integral part of city life, even as roundups targeted it and power was exerted against it. Despite the ideas of Paz, the efforts of sexologists and criminologists to “cure” homosexuality, the attempted co-optation of alternative masculinities, and the designation of the *pelado* as authentic, no fully invulnerable Mexico could be made. This then served as the justification for the homophobic “panic” that swept out in 1959, a violent attempt to restore authority over a city and nation viewed as too compromised by foreign, homosexual influence.

Chapter 7: Glimpses from the Golden Age: Homosexual Spaces, Identities, and Communities, 1940-1960

The irony of the 1940s and 1950s, a time of increased state consolidation and attempts to effect cultural nationalism, is that it also marked a high point in the *ambiente* during the twentieth century. Even as writers, politicians, criminologists, and pundits sought to define Mexican identity and citizenship narrowly, as described in Chapter 6, homosexual men articulated their own understandings of citizenship and created vibrant and visible social spaces. They also developed ideas about identity and community that broke with nationalist heteronormativity in favor of heterogeneous forms of masculinity and citizenship.

This chapter offers several examples from the 1940s and 1950s and two extended case studies about the *ambiente*, how homosexual men participated in it, and where the social spaces were that they created. The examples provided here are not exhaustive; instead, they are representative illustrations of a wider body of materials that remain in case files, press articles, memoirs, published materials, letters, and photographs. At the core of this chapter are glimpses of working-class homosexual life, from a party in a personal home in 1940 to the *ambiente* of bars like La Lucha and El Dragón de Oro to the repeated roundups of the 1950s that could achieve only a partial dismantling of the queer social world.

Every period I have described in this project has shown that the myths of invisibility, isolation, and internalization are just that: myths. What sets this period apart was the amplification of both the *ambiente*—particularly that found among the working-classes—and attempts to contain it. Rather than homosexuality being a characteristic of only the wealthier classes—insofar as it was understood to be a basis or component for identities and communities—it was instead integral to working-class men's lives. Working-class social spaces were often also the most vibrant in Mexican urban centers.

In a nutshell: the 1940s and 1950s marked a “golden age” of the *ambiente*, and because of the prominence of working-class men in it, this golden age calls into question the legitimacy of the *pelado* as a national symbol. Understandably, as had happened in other international cities, this vibrant *ambiente* in Mexico City came under intense pressure from the state and cultural actors; by the end of the 1950s, particularly after the Casasola murders, much of the homosexual social sphere had been pushed into hiding and was largely forgotten by the late 1970s. This led to later perspectives that viewed the period as one largely bereft of homosexual community or identity outside of a handful of elite circles and one marked by vicious homophobia.¹

This chapter revises this perspective through a social history and geography of the *ambiente* between 1940 and 1960 that, through the experiences of men from “below” and “above,” shows how interwoven homosexual men’s lives were in multiple spheres of Mexican political, cultural, and social life. I begin with a section based on the experiences that writer/playwright Tennessee Williams had in Mexico in 1940 (which included a rare glimpse inside a Mexican homosexual man’s home and allow us to understand an intriguing convergence between Catholicism and homosexuality). Then, I present two case studies on working-class *ambiente* in Mexico City bars from 1945 and 1947; these bars have, to my knowledge, never been described in academic literature before this project, and the case studies allow us to understand both the social practices and spaces in which the men spent their time, as well as state and journalistic efforts to punish homosexual men once those sites had been located. Both studies offer important insights, from the legal challenges homosexuals made in attempts to

¹ Carlos Monsiváis’s collected essays have served as important references points for this chapter, and they are some of the sources to which this chapter is responding. However, Monsiváis’s descriptions of the *ambiente* and those in it have largely focused on the middle- and elite classes, and his insightful chronicles, which paint engaging portraits of many aspects of the *ambiente*, are not always precise in terms of their details. This chapter then is both a corrective and homage to that work, showing the value of historical investigations and how far more existed than what Monsiváis described. Conveniently, his works can be consulted in a single volume. See Carlos Monsiváis, *Que se abra esa puerta: Crónicas y ensayos sobre la diversidad sexual* (Mexico, D.F.: Paidós, 2010).

assert their constitutional rights to the internal conflicts that some felt over their homosexuality. The final section covers 1947-1960, offering further examples of the homosexual social sphere's archipelago, as well as attempts to dismantle it. I present examples from both "below" and "above," showing the range of possibilities open to homosexual men and the points at which different social spheres intersected, such as in certain working-class bars in the capital's center. Conceptually, then, this chapter expands the definition of who were agents within the *ambiente*'s golden age, recovers the "lost" experiences and spaces in which that age occurred, and shows the limits of homophobic nationalism, even as its ability to penetrate the social world increased.

I. A Visitor in a Strange Land

During the 1940s and 1950s, numerous sites throughout Mexico City served as meeting points for queer men. As we are "visitors" to this world, it is fitting to begin with a visitor to the *ambiente*'s social world who moved between transnational spaces like the Balderas YMCA to a private Mexican home. Writer/playwright Tennessee Williams' letters, memoirs, and interviews shed light not only on his experiences as a US American man in Mexico, but also on the *ambiente* itself, and they offer some rare glimpses of the forms of kinship and home life that at least some Mexican homosexuals experienced during the period. They also show how the non-verbal languages used in the *ambiente* were as much local as they were transnational, making queer individuals legible across borders.

Traveling Down Mexico Way

In August 1940, Tennessee Williams traveled to Mexico City, hoping to escape from a broken heart after a failed romantic relationship that had left him overwhelmed with emotions.² Mexico

² Williams was "running away" because his emotions overwhelming him like "having sixteen cylinders in a jalopy." Tennessee Williams, *The Selected Letters of Tennessee Williams, Volume 1, 1920-1945*, ed. Albert J. Devlin and

offered an alluring escape, with over a decade of investment from public and private sources on both sides of the border pumped into promoting Mexico's cultures, historical sites, and environment.³ Travel was also a means of bridging the divides between the two countries and extending friendship in the era of the Good Neighbor Policy, a role that would increase as Mexico entered World War II as a member of the Allies.⁴ Williams' own trajectory would take him through a rollicking car ride, a week in the capital staying at the Balderas YMCA, and then on to Acapulco, which would influence his famous short story and play *The Night of the Iguana*.⁵ What is more, he hoped to find the *ambiente* while there, to escape not only into Mexico's exotic landscapes, but also into the arms of its erotic men as part of a "gay-mad sort of life."⁶

Williams hitched a ride with a newly married Mexican man, his American wife, and the man's three Mexican bachelor friends through a "share-the-expense travel agency."⁷ The man had come with his friends to New York to see the 1940's World's Fair. In both directions, they used part of a new system of over ten thousand kilometers of roads built between 1925 and 1940.

Nancy M. Tischler (New York: New Directions, 2000). The letter is number 159 in the collection, written to Lawrence Langer, August 22, 1940.

³ On the development of the tourism industry, see Dina Berger and Andrew Grant Wood, eds., *Holiday in Mexico: Critical Reflections on Tourism and Tourist Encounters* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Dina Berger, *The Development of Mexico's Tourism Industry: Pyramids by Day, Martinis by Night* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Alex Saragoza, "The Selling of Mexico: Tourism and the State, 1929-1952," in *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, and Eric Zolov (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 91-115.

⁴ Dina Berger, "Goodwill Ambassadors on Holiday: Tourism, Diplomacy, and Mexico-U.S. Relations," in *Holiday in Mexico: Critical Reflections on Tourism and Tourist Encounters*, ed. Dina Berger and Andrew Grant Wood (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 107-129; Stephen R. Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1999), 101, 176; Friedrich E. Schuler, *Mexico Between Hitler and Roosevelt: Mexican Foreign Relations in the Age of Lázaro Cárdenas, 1934-1940* (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1998).

⁵ Tennessee Williams, *Memoirs* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1983), 58. Mexico served as a formative spot for Williams, influencing his writing for decades.

⁶ Williams, *Selected Letters*, vol. 1, 270-271. The letter is number 161, written to Joseph Hazan, August 23, 1940, the day that Williams left for Mexico. In the letter, he writes about wanting to forget his lost love with new friends and experiences during his first week in the city, then heading to the beach to "catch up" with himself and wait for his play *Battle of Angels* to be produced in the States.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 268.; Dotson Rader, "The Art of Theater V: Tennessee Williams," in *Conversations with Tennessee Williams*, ed. Albert J. Devlin (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1986), 339-340.; Williams, *Memoirs*, 57.

These roads “connected the country, increasingly linking people from different regions and towns to national political, economic, and cultural life” and they, along with the nationalization of oil, “provided a constant reminder...that Mexicans could develop their own country.”⁸

From the beginning, the trip was exciting. The husband had married a prostitute in Manhattan and was taking her to his wealthy family in Mexico City. It did not take long for Williams to see something was amiss in this arrangement, including what Williams called a “total language barrier” between them, and a more serious issue: “She was a voluptuous piece and he was voluptuous, too, and when you say a man, a bridegroom is voluptuous, it’s not a compliment to him.”⁹ As Williams recalled later in life, “I think he was gay, you know, because all the *other* men in the car were.”¹⁰ As the trip progressed, Williams noticed that “the prostitute-bride became increasingly nervous at the prospect of entering her husband’s household, and I soon got the impression that things were not working out very propitiously between the pair in the sack,” particularly when the wife poured out her heart to Williams at one stop. Unfortunately for her, Williams proved to be just as resistant, for similar reasons, to her advances.¹¹

Given the way Williams described the newlyweds and how they met—as part of an initial adventure in New York and then another back to Mexico City—it is easy to conclude that theirs was a marriage of convenience, at least on the part of the young man.¹² He needed a wife—and

⁸ Wendy Waters, “Remapping Identities: Road Construction and Nation Building in Postrevolutionary Mexico,” in *The Eagle and the Virgin: National and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, ed. Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 224-225. Lázaro Cárdenas, who used the roads to campaign across the nation in 1934, also nationalized the oil industry in 1938, which according to Waters “provided the final ingredient to the process of making road construction and transport a symbol of Mexico’s nationalist path to development.” Anti-vice campaigns, like those discussed in Chapter 6, were thus needed to protect that nationalist investment, lest the workers derail the efforts through their other interests.

⁹ Williams, *Memoirs*, 56-57.

¹⁰ Rader, “The Art of Theater V,” 339.

¹¹ Williams, *Memoirs*, 56-57. The scene is both tragic and humorous in Williams’s telling.

¹² One wonders if the woman felt “duped” by the man’s wealth, cosmopolitanism, and charm—as well as the thrill of adventure—particularly as he proved to be less interested in her sexually, at least initially. This would be an alternative form of duping than that described in Chapter 4.

from Williams' perspective, did not know she was a prostitute—to show to his family, quite possibly because he had inclinations towards other men. The man's trip north, which mirrored those of other men like Salvador Novo and Xavier Villarrutia, was thus his last bachelor's fling with his homosexual friends before assuming a heteronormative station in life.¹³ Moreover, a trip to the US offered a liminal, transnational space/time in which he could express himself with his friends, free from familial or cultural oversight.

After many days, the party arrived in the Mexican capital, where they deposited Williams at the Mexican Uai, an inexpensive choice for those who did not have many contacts in the city and one that carried the prospect of interactions with handsome young men.¹⁴ However, in general, Williams described time at the YMCA as lonely, in large part due to his "exhausted nerves" after his breakup.¹⁵ The city compounded his turmoil, overwhelming him. As he wrote to a friend on September 3, 1940, "Mexico City is too big to take in one gulp so I am going away to the beach till my throat stops aching and then come back and try to swallow some more."¹⁶ He admitted, however, that the city had a "tremendous lot" that would interest him.

Two experiences that the writer had in Mexico City show how the *ambiente*, despite his lack of interest at the time, still found him. While descending the stairs at the YMCA one day, he encountered an "elderly American queen wearing makeup" who

¹³ Things apparently worked out in some fashion, as Williams received a warm letter from the woman a few years later with some of the clothing he'd left in the trunk of their car.

¹⁴ Ibid., 58. Perhaps they did so purposefully, recognizing that Williams, like themselves, preferred his own sex. As young queer men of means, they likely would have known about the Mexican Y's homoerotic opportunities. Williams himself had experience with lodging at the West Side YMCA in New York, which soon after its construction in 1930, became known as an "elegant brothel" where sex was easy to find with beautiful "Greek gods" in the showers. See George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 155-156. Williams was staying at the 63rd Street Y by January 1940; see letter number 133, pg 233-234 in *The Selected Letters of Tennessee Williams, Volume 1, 1920-1945*, dated January 8, 1940.

¹⁵ Williams, *Selected Letters*, vol. 1, 273. Williams to Joseph Hazan, Sept. 3, 1940.

¹⁶ Ibid. Williams to Joseph Hazan, September 3, 1940. He was likely suffering from altitude sickness, as he stated in a later letter that a headache contributed to his hasty departure for Acapulco. Ibid., 280. Letter 166, to the Williams Family, Sept 21, 1940.

greeted me like a close friend of long standing and she soon invited me to visit her room and look at her album of souvenir photos. (The kind of photo collection called a fag's album.) There was one picture that I remember distinctly, it was a photograph of Glenway Wescott in the bloom of his youth, skinny-dipping in a mountain lake of very clear water.¹⁷

The presence of an openly gender-bending and homosexual American “queen” suggests that the authorities at the Mexican YMCA were at least tacitly tolerant of homosexuals in 1940 and that the Uai remained a site for homosexuals two decades after Elías Nandino met Francisco Sánchez there. The openness with which the man presented his queerness—such as greeting other boarders like Williams as friends while wearing makeup—suggests that the meeting on the stairs was not an isolated occurrence and that open queer socialization occurred there even as the organization had become more oriented towards the local community and youths. The more interesting question is whether or not the elderly American queen and others like him had contact with Mexican queer circles. Given the Uai's location in an area known for homosexual cruising and residences and its own *ambiente*, it is very likely that such interactions did occur.

Saints and Sinners: At Home with Juanita, “Queen of the Male Whores” and His Entourage

This leads to the second event in which Williams intersected with the *ambiente*, only this time, specifically with Mexicans: when walking one day, he was “accosted on the street” by “Juanita...the queen of the male whores in Mexico City” and some of the other men who then carted Williams away to Juanita's residence where he spent an evening laughing, drinking with, and observing his new friends.¹⁸ While we do not know their motivations for choosing Williams specifically—perhaps they initially sought him as a john, were attracted to his obvious

¹⁷ Williams, *Memoirs*, 58. Wescott (1901-1987) was a major American novelist during the 1920s-1940s. He was of the same age as the Mexican Contemporáneos, such as Nandino (1900-1993) and one of the many homosexual writers and artists involved in transnational circuits that flourished well before the emergence of sexual liberation movements.

¹⁸ Williams, *Selected Letters*, vol. 1, 273-274. Letter 161, to Joseph Hazan, September 3, 1940.

foreignness, or just found him attractive. Perhaps they recognized a kindred spirit with the skills of their trade as they cruised the street, sizing-up Williams and identifying him as belonging in “oblique world of those who understand each other with a glance,” a world that extended across national borders.¹⁹ This would not be surprising—the same had occurred between Salvador, a Mexican, and Roy, a US American, in New York in 1935.²⁰ Or perhaps they “accosted” him with their “strangeness” and “poetic license” because he was—knowingly or otherwise—traversing prime cruising grounds by virtue of walking out the YMCA’s door.

Regardless, that they pounced on him is fortuitous because their bold move brought him into their private living quarters where socialization occurred and kinship developed, offering him and us a rare glimpse inside the domestic spaces of non-elite Mexicans.²¹ From the description Williams provided, Juanita had a flair for devotional kitsch of more than one kind:

We sat in a room with pale pink walls and enormously high ceiling, covered with pictures of nudes and pictures of Saints and madonnas. The bed was very wide to accommodate several simultaneous parties and was covered with pale lettuce-green satin spread. Above it hung a handsome black and silver crucifix and Jesus with great sorrowful dark eyes looking over the pitiful acts of lust that went on there. No doubt thanking his lucky stars that he remained a celibate on earth, because if he had not—it is quite likely he would have been a fairy.²²

William’s description shows that the men’s devotional objects—both those related to Catholic beliefs and those related to the pleasures of the male body—intermingled together. This pastiche should not be surprising, given the attention lavished on the corporeal forms of saints, including those found in public locations such as a parish church or cathedral or in the private home.²³ As

¹⁹ Salvador Novo, *La estatua de sal* (Mexico: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1998), 102.

²⁰ See Chapter 4.

²¹ Indeed, the opportunity that Williams’s letter offers for anyone seeking to understand more about the archipelago of *ambiente* that pervaded Mexico City is hard to overstate, because it offers important insights into a segment of the capital’s homosexual community which proves challenging to reconstruct.

²² *Selected Letters*, vol. 1, 273. The high-ceilings may suggest that the home was one of the older buildings in the area. Letter 161.

²³ Sexualized cults around saints had existed since at least the Middle Ages. See Mark D. Jordan, “Saint Pelagius, Ephebe and Martyr,” in *Queer Iberia: Sexualities, Cultures, and Crossings from the Middle Ages to the*

religious scholar Daniel Boisvert has asserted, saints were icons who could be adored, desired, and worshipped, when other male bodies were off-limits; at the same time that same-sex desires were discouraged and punished, impressionable youths were also given opportunities to worship the ideal and partially nude bodies of male saints. Exhortations to chastity accompanied approval of emulating and rushing “into the arms” of the “virile saints,” and in this way, the male saint

became an erotic fixation, an ever-present site of potential sexual affirmation and release...a stark manifestation of a Catholic culture at once repressive and liberating, of a Catholicism that bespoke homoerotic desire while also denying it vociferously.²⁴

Chief among the iconic saints for homosexuals, for centuries, has been St. Sebastian who, as a Christian member of the Praetorian Guard, was first shot with arrows, survived and nursed to health, then clubbed to death after challenging the Emperor Diocletian a second time. In the centuries after his double martyrdom, his image transitioned from a middle-aged soldier, the third patron of Rome and of archers to a beautiful beardless youth who was the chief intercessor against the Black Death.²⁵ By the Renaissance, he had become an erotic icon to women and men.

St. Sebastian’s popularity stemmed in part from a belief that suffering was a “redemptive fact of life” and his androgynous mix of virile beauty and “feminine” passivity (as he was penetrated by arrows, phallic symbols of power and dominance). As Boisvert asserted,

the torturous throes of martyred bodies can appear erotic in the extreme, as indeed they were always meant to be. From these ambiguous images, desire is born, be it desire for spiritual union or the more problematic desire for sexual coupling.²⁶

In Juanita’s home, the lines between homoeroticism and homophobia were dismantled in corporeal pleasures enacted across the room; the bed, poised under devotional iconography

Renaissance, ed. Josiah Blackmore and Gregory S. Hutcheson (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 23-47. Both men and women were members of the cult.

²⁴ Daniel Boisvert, *Sanctity and Male Desire: A Gay Reading of Saints* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim's Press, 2004), 8.

²⁵ Brian Parker, “Tennessee Williams and the Legends of St. Sebastian,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 69, no. 3 (June 1, 2000): 635-636.

²⁶ Boisvert, *Sanctity and Male Desire*, 42.

dedicated to both the spirit and the flesh, became a borderland, a site where fantasies about men mingled with those about salvation.²⁷ What wry smiles, looks, or jokes passed between the men about what they did while on their knees? Juanita also showed a sense of irony, insofar as he and his friends queered devotional practices that were part of a morality system that excluded them as deviant, sinful, and nefarious. Such a blending also could point to an effort to “glorify” mundane existence or to “surmount and transcend human contingency,” including within a hostile society.²⁸ In this way, Juanita’s home was a sanctuary in multiple senses, a temple to the pleasures of the flesh—from sex to the images of nude men on the walls—and to religious culture, with neither clearly delineated from the other.

The interactions between men at Juanita’s home also point to how Mexican homosexual men fashioned alternative forms of kinship. Similar to the sixty men rounded up in 1927 described in Chapter 4, the group headed by Juanita shared experiences and developed friendships walking the streets in search of tricks, and his home served as a focal point of interaction where they could share each other’s company, have sex, and create a social world. As “queen,” this social world revolved around Juanita, and if he truly lived up to his name, it suggests that the gatherings involved more than simply an ad hoc social order.²⁹ At the very least, members of his community did not live in isolation, and they clearly also had moments of joy, including those they were willing to share with a foreigner unable to speak their language.

They were also beautiful, and one gets the sense from Williams’ text that the men were so beautiful that they would have tempted the saints on the walls themselves and were in some

²⁷ Both the bodies of lovers and those of the saints required a tactile interaction, thereby blurring the line between eroticism and devotion more fully.

²⁸ Ibid., 18.

²⁹ Annick Prieur revealed that a similar house, led by a “matriarch” named Mema and full of young men who slept with other men, existed in the 1990s. See Annick Prieur, *Mema's House, Mexico City: On Transvestites, Queens, and Machos* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

way holy. “Some of the whores,” he wrote, “were very, very lovely with eyes dark and lustrous as those of the Christ and smooth olive skins.” Despite such beauty, Williams resisted, staying “out of bed with them” because he suspected they were “rotten with disease” although he succumbed partially to one “who was so lovely that when he kissed and embraced me, I had an orgasm, but I showed more than my usual discipline and kept out of any real mischief.”³⁰

Williams felt relieved in spending time with the young men, because they spoke no English nor he Spanish, thus negating the “tiresome necessity for conversation” which he claimed to despise. Visual and bodily languages, instead, were their communication, and they laughed and drank together. As the revelry progressed, three of the young men with a “feminine quality that was graceful and charming” began to sing a haunting, “beautiful song called ‘Amor Perdida’” with their “exquisite high voices.” The song was in fact “Amor Perdido”, a popular bolero written by Puerto Rican composer Pedro Flores, which had appeared that same August for the first time on Mexican radio. The song contains, according to scholar Juan Gelpí,

clear allusions to intimate relationships in an urban setting, and it represents love as a modern experience that is as unstable and transitory as a game of chance. In this song there is an acceptance of the change that has affected former lovers, since now they are merely passers-by.³¹

No wonder it was already a favorite among the *afeminados* at Juanita’s house, given their trade and the time they spent on the streets converting salted glances into sex and lovers into passersby. “They were like sad, wonderful flowers—*Fleurs de mal*—their price was two pesos, the equivalent of forty cents,” recalled Williams. How many “lost loves” had they known?³²

³⁰ Williams, *Selected Letters*, vol. 1, 273-274.

³¹ Juan G. Gelpí, “Walking in the Modern City: Subjectivity and Cultural Contacts in the Urban Crónicas of Salvador Novo and Carlos Monsiváis,” in *The Contemporary Mexican Chronicle*, ed. Ignacio Corona and Beth Ellen Jorgensen (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 216.

³² Williams, *Selected Letters*, vol. 1, 273-274. According to Mexican activist Max Mejía, the song would take on added meaning for homosexual men in the 1940s, particularly after famous singer Maria Luisa Landín recorded it and sang it in the masculine gender. Mejía asserts that “outside closed homosexual circles, nobody noticed that it

Unfortunately, in terms of knowing more about Juanita, Williams only would spend one night with him and his entourage. He soon headed off to Acapulco where his health improved; there he took a lover named Carlos whose response to Williams question “do you like boys or girls” received the reply “it’s not important.” Again, the limited communication was enough to arrange frolics on the beach where “under the moon and the whispering mango trees...the restless beast in the jungle under the skin comes out for a little air.”³³

Although a visitor, Williams would be marked by his experience in Mexico in 1940. It is known that his work *The Night of the Iguana* was based in part on his experiences in Acapulco. But I want to suggest that it was his time in Mexico City, however fleeting, that would reverberate throughout the next decades of his life and that the *ambiente* lived on in his writings. Williams would eventually convert to Catholicism himself in the 1960s, but before that, he wrote a poem about St. Sebastian (“San Sebastiano de Sodoma”) based on various images of the saint, especially that by Sodoma (Giovanni Antonio Bazzi, ca. 1525) in Florence. The combination of saints and sex had been made plain to him in 1940 in Juanita’s house. He also would pen an essay entitled “Amor Perdido, or How It Feels To Become a Professional Playwright,” (originally written in 1940) which took its name from the song he heard there.³⁴ And, one of his later works, *Suddenly Last Summer* (1958), which has been remarked upon by several scholars as containing imagery about St. Sebastian, also seems to reference his experiences in Mexico, if at a more negative level. The character Sebastian, who never appears on stage, was killed in Europe by a group of brown boys who cannibalized him. One wonders if the initial spark of this idea

was a gay love song. Nevertheless, it is clearly a song sung by one man to another.” Max Mejia, “Mexico Pink,” in *Different Rainbows*, ed. Peter Drucker (London: Gay Men’s Press, 2000), 47.

³³ Williams, *Selected Letters*, vol. 1, 276. Letter 164, to Joseph Hazan, September 3, 1940. As cited in the letter, they are “Ustedes amor muchachos o muchachas!” and “Non importe!” The texts confirm the playwright’s limited, but effective knowledge of Spanish.

³⁴ Although in the essay he describes sitting in Acapulco listening to a jukebox the bolero—“the most beautiful of all musical compositions”—he had first heard it in Juanita’s home sung by the beautiful young men.

was Juanita's group of "brown" Mexicans that swarmed and threatened to devour him with their beauty, particularly if, as it seems, Sebastian was in part based on Williams' own experience.

For this study on Mexico, Williams' accounts of August 1940 open a window into a largely forgotten world, and they serve as a reminder of the ways in which the local and transnational converged in sites like Juanita's home, the bed, and in the explosive kiss of a Mexico City male prostitute. The evidence that Catholicism was an important part of homosexuals' lives is important, as it shows yet another way that the *ambiente* overlapped with mainstream spheres of socialization and could coexist with them even in a hostile environment. A rejection of all tenants of religion, then, was not needed for a homosexual identity, nor were all the men interested in "witchcraft" and magic as sensational stories of the day suggested.³⁵ In other words, being homosexual did not require the abandonment of culturally important religious practices for their supposed antitheses, even as it helped articulate an alternative vision of what those practices would mean on a personal or community level.

One postscript: Unfortunately, we do not have, in their own words, the experiences of the men at Juanita's residence, nor do we know how they would have spoken about the evening themselves. Their interest in Catholicism, though, was not unique, and while concrete examples of devotional practices among homosexuals are few in the existing official literature—aside from the references made to talismans or belief in magic among some homosexuals—there is another interesting source. In March 1954, Dr. Rafael Sandoval Camacho completed a series of surgeries beginning the previous year on a man named Jorge, who would thereafter be known as Marta. As described in Chapter 6, this was his "treatment" of homosexuality. One of the photos taken to publicize the successful operations and Marta's subsequent life was one of her standing under an

³⁵ Sergio Fernández, "El descaro de los sodomitas," *Suplemento de Policía*, March 25, 1948, 9. Discourses on sexuality, Catholicism, and witchcraft have often converged.

image of the Virgin of Guadalupe holding a statuette of the same. What Marta was thinking is unclear, but the image is one that, along with others showing in domestic scenes and the floral print she wore in the photo in question, shows her completing her transition to womanhood.³⁶ Like Juanita and his friends, Marta's life incorporated Catholicism, rather than being defined against it, even as officially the church remained nominally antagonistic towards homosexuality.³⁷

II: Case Study: "La Lucha": The Fight Over Homosexuality in One Working-Class, Neighborhood Bar

Had Williams stayed longer in the capital, he would have found an extensive array of sites where men of the *ambiente* socialized. Some had been popular for decades, such as the Alameda Park, so much so that Aurelio Torres had felt it necessary to write to President Avila Camacho about their activities there in 1942.³⁸ Private parties, such as those Juanita held, would also remain a fixture of the homosexual social sphere. Other sites would become important, particularly the working-class bars that both employed and catered to individuals in the *ambiente*, including from their own neighborhoods. Writing in the 1970s, anthropologist Clark Taylor asserted that during World War II, "between ten and fifteen homosexual gathering places were in operation in Mexico City." According to Taylor, "dancing was permitted in at least two: El Africa and El Triunfo." Some like El Eco "were very elegant (with live bands, statuary and affluent crowds), and others, like [El] Tenampa with its mariachi bands were very ordinary."³⁹

³⁶ These and many other photos can be found in the AGN's Fototeca.

³⁷ For example, in June 1952, the Vatican labeled French writer André Gide's entire corpus of work as prohibited material. See "Todas las obras del finado André Gide, prohibidas," *El Porvenir*, June 1, 1952, 1.

³⁸ See Chapter 6. "Liga Nacional Contra los Homosexuales to Avila Camacho," October 21, 1942, AGN, Galeria 3, Manuel Avila Camacho, exp. 540/14.

³⁹ Clark Taylor, "El Ambiente: Male Homosexual Social Life in Mexico City" (Dissertation, University of California, Berkley, 1978), 32. Taylor does not cite a source, but the same claim has appeared in other sources, including in a website chronology of gay Mexican history by Len Evans (<http://gayinsacramento.com/Chron-Mex.htm>, 2002) and an encyclopedic entry by sociologist Stephen Murray for gltbq.com

On one hand, Taylor's claim is tantalizing, as it speaks to the development of the *ambiente* into a more institutionalized format, i.e., through the proliferation of formal businesses rather than impromptu parties. And for the entire 1940s and 1950s, Taylor's number likely underestimated the number of homosexual sites where interactions, including dancing, were more common than was remembered by his informants a few decades later, as the examples I provide below show. Bars, cantinas, and cabarets could be found across the city, from working-class neighborhoods north, south, and east of the Centro to wealthier neighborhoods to the west.

On the other hand, I have been unable to corroborate the specific examples he provided, beyond that of El Tenampa, which was a site for *ambiente* already in the 1920s. El Eco did exist, although information about it is from the 1950s, not during World War II, and I have found no mention of either El Africa or El Triunfo in my research.⁴⁰ This is not to say they did not exist; on the contrary, given the fragmented nature of source materials, they may very well have existed and have been victims of the "forgetting" of this golden age of homosexual life.⁴¹

However, I can show the existence of other sites by 1945 and beyond that have previously not been discussed in the historiography by weaving together pieces from memoirs, documents, and press articles. Most of the information about the sites I describe below, for better or worse, is from official sources or those in the press, as it was when other visitors—whether tourists from another part of Mexico, a journalist, or the police—entered this world that we gain

(<http://www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/mexico,2.html>, 2004) that was reprinted in Javier Corrales and Mario Pecheny, eds., *The Politics of Sexuality in Latin America: a Reader on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Rights* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 63. It is even now part of the Wikipedia page, with attribution back to Murray who has no attribution on his article and does not cite Taylor, although it seems it came from him. It may be one of those claims that so often has been said as to render it true.

⁴⁰ Carlos Monsiváis, "Los gays en México: la fundación, la ampliación, la consolidación del gueto," in *Que se abra esa puerta* (Mexico, D.F.: Paidós, 2010), 125. See also the history of El Eco, located at www.eleco.unam.mx which cites its opening as in 1952 due to artist Mathias Goeritz and entrepreneur Daniel Mont.

⁴¹ Some of Taylor's informants were older men who were unnamed. They looked on the period with nostalgia, and it is possible they were the source of the bar's names.

insight into the *ambiente*. This section offers a detailed look at the bar La Lucha in Colonia Obrera. In 1945, this bar would be the site of a scandal that would splash across the press, and the event offers a lens through which to see multiple spheres of homosexual life at the neighborhood level, in the bar itself, in homes nearby, and in prison in the aftermath. This level of specificity is possible because the materials that remain on the initial scandal and resulting police raids are substantial. And, the example illuminates the material consequences that the period's discourses had on homosexuals' lives, particularly as the state exercised more power vis-à-vis homosexuals.

The Home Front: The War on Vice, February 1945

By February 1945, news reports and editorials covering the ongoing campaigns against Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan dominated the Mexican press. Mexico's own military contribution to the war effort—the famous Squadron 201—trained for its eventual deployment to the Pacific theater, having already become a symbol of national pride.⁴² Feelings of national unity swept the nation, sparked by German attacks on Mexican shipping in 1942 and bolstered by the Ávila Camacho administration's promotion of industrialization as the “way to modernize the country and to merge the contrasting definitions of revolutionary legacy” together.⁴³ Wartime propaganda urged Mexicans to support the war effort through production; “by industrializing, the country would safeguard the ideal that revolutionaries fought for by guaranteeing an Allied victory.” This was part of the administration's efforts to “erase revolutionary factionalism”—

⁴² The Escuadrón 201, nicknamed the Aztec Eagles, fought with the American air force in the Pacific theater during World War II, specifically during the liberation of the Philippines in 1945. It was Mexico's primary military contribution to the war effort, and one of only two Latin American military formations—the other being the Brazilian Expeditionary Force, which fought in Europe—to take part.

⁴³ Monica A. Rankin, *¡México, la patria! Propaganda and Production during World War II* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 295. See also Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s*.

which had so divided the nation in the twenty years since that war—“and replace it with national unity based in democracy and modernization.”⁴⁴

However, a negative consequence of industrialization, from the perspective of middle-class social reformers and the state, was the growth and flourishing of *antros de vicio*—“centers of vice” such as cantinas and brothels—near the industrial sites. These businesses succeeded despite a “squeeze” on wages that workers earned and the inflation affecting important food and basic consumer goods prices; simply put, men wanted to have a good time and were willing to spend their wages in that pursuit.⁴⁵ In response, authorities initiated nation-wide effort to close these sites. By the early days of February 1945, a “brigade of special inspectors,” at the behest of the Secretaría de Trabajo (Ministry of Labor), had already launched vigorous, surprise raids against centers of vice located in the nation’s industrial zones. Newspaper *El Popular* cited efforts to close cantinas and brothels located near areas of petroleum production such as Reventadero and Cacalilao, as well as along railroads. Authorities planned additional raids on areas around mines, textile factories, and “in all those regions where there is ‘unbridled speculation’ in vice.”⁴⁶ During the same week in the capital, a similar campaign was underway, with a hotel and five brothels shuttered, their proprietors consigned to prison.⁴⁷

A prime motivation for the closures was the perceived threat that such centers presented for working-class Mexican laborers and for the nation’s moral fabric. Workers “left a good part of their salaries” in cantinas and brothels conveniently located near their job sites, spending their money on booze and sex, rather than on more productive pursuits. Such actions threatened

⁴⁴ Rankin, *¡México, la patria!*, 296.

⁴⁵ Alan Knight, “Mexico, c. 1930-1946,” in *The Cambridge History of Latin America: Latin America since 1930, Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean*, ed. Leslie Bethell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 73.

⁴⁶ “Batida contra los centros de vicio,” *El Popular*, February 6, 1945, 9.

⁴⁷ “Clausura de antros de vicio,” *El Popular*, February 5, 1945, 4.

nationalist images that authorities wanted to portray, as the men were not using the funds to help the nation develop, but were instead squandering it. Nor were the men serving as ideal breadwinners. Thus, while Mexican workers produced war materials for the Allied cause and the government stoked patriotism, on the home front the war was fought against vice.

It was during this time that Carlos Canto Prado, a traveler and merchant from the Yucatán, and his friend César Castilla Pérez visited the capital. Wanting to “*lanzar una cana al aire en la capital*,” i.e., “let their hair down” in the city, they encountered the cantina La Lucha, located at calle Lucas Alamán 18 in Colonia Obrera, a working-class district south of the Centro that housed several industrial and artisanal centers as well as working-class housing.⁴⁸ La Lucha was a *piquera* (literally a “hole”) and was much to their liking, offering the sort of escape they sought. It was also precisely the sort of center of vice located near an industrial area targeted by the ongoing campaign because it, like other cantinas, cultivated a male-oriented, homosocial space lubricated with alcohol. The difference between La Lucha and the others closed earlier in the week, however, was its pronounced, even scandalous *ambiente*; while any bar could serve as a site for sharing beers with one’s *cuates* (close friends), La Lucha offered interactions between men that blurred and often broke the line between homosocial and homoerotic bonds.

The bar may have escaped the notice of the police and press had it not been for the interactions between Canto Prado, his friend, and Jesús Cruz García, “a young man of such an attractive presence due to his demeanor and conversational style” who chatted them up at the bar. It was not uncommon for strangers to invite others to a drink, and since cantinas were male-

⁴⁸ Delegación Cuauhtémoc, “Colonia Obrera,” *Colonias de la demarcación*, <http://www.cuauhtemoc.df.gob.mx/delegacion/mapa/colonias.html>. Accessed April 28, 2011. Originally founded in 1889 as Cuartelito, Obrera became an industrial and artisanal center in Mexico City by the early twentieth century, thereby earning its name, as the word *obrero/a* refers to a “worker.” *El Universal*, when reporting on the raid, called the establishment “Mi Lucha.” See “Cierra la policía un centro de afeminados,” *El Universal*, February 9, 1945, sec. 2, 1.

oriented spaces, men would share drinks with other men as newfound friends.⁴⁹ Cruz, for his part, was delightful company. He skillfully chose “subjects that he considered would interest them, and he organized the discussion” as the men whiled away the hours. The problem, which Canto Prado asserted later when interviewed by the police, was that Cruz employed his talents “without identifying himself as a *fichador*.” In other words, he felt that he had been had. To make matters worse, in a moment of “carelessness”—no doubt exacerbated by the copious booze and the pleasing interactions with the young man, Canto Prado lost his valuable gold watch, worth some three hundred pesos. This “kicked up a fuss,” and Canto Prado denounced Cruz to the police, leading to the latter’s detention as the alleged thief.⁵⁰

Cruz practiced, reported *El Popular*, a “new and curious system of exploitation” found at the cantina. Despite lacking “beautiful blondes and tempting brunettes, certain gentlemen of ‘seductive’ conversation retain moneyed customers, and for each drink for which these ask, the said *fichadores* receive twenty cents.” The word *fichador* was a masculinized version of the word *fichera*, a term describing women who sold their company and conversation to men at a cantina, earning tips for every drink the customer bought.⁵¹ Journalist David Lida describes:

Most of a *fichera*’s clients are after nothing more than her sympathetic presence: a woman he can flirt with who will not rebuff his advances; a woman to whom he can

⁴⁹ Turning down invitations to a drink—or to buy one for someone—could be deadly, as seen in police and press reports throughout the period.

⁵⁰ “Nuevo y curioso sistema de explotación descubierto en una cantina del D.F.,” *El Popular*, February 7, 1945, 4. On the value of the watch, see “Vergonzosas escenas se ven en un cabaret de infima categoría, denominado ‘La Lucha’,” *Excelsior*, February 7, 1945, sec. 2, 1. The term “cabaret” is slippery, in a Mexican historical context, because it could refer to both big-production style venues popular with tourists and neighborhood cantinas in which impromptu vamping or shows were performed for a smaller-scale audience. On the diverse sort of sites that were labeled as cabarets, see Armando Jiménez, *Sitios de rompe y rasga en la ciudad de México* (Mexico, D.F.: Oceano, 1998). “Cabaret” was also a term used to denigrate sites of the *ambiente* in which gender-bending occurred, even if those sites did not have official shows, by linking them to dancing and performance styles like the Bataclán.

⁵¹ The term *fichera* stems from *ficha*, the record, file card, or bill on which the drinks were tallied.

recount the various misadventures and misunderstandings of his life; a woman with whom he can dance to the familiar ballads on the jukebox.⁵²

While such interaction did not promise sex, many *ficheras* were game, provided the customer paid the management for her exit from the bar.⁵³ In this way, cantinas staffed with *ficheras* offered the possibility of a shoulder to cry on, short-term romance, and sexual adventure. At La Lucha, men provided these opportunities, and Cruz offered similar service to Canto Prado.⁵⁴

So, what did Canto Prado and his friend really want when they entered La Lucha and what really was going on between them and Jesús Cruz? It is possible that as out-of-towners, they may have not known the type of bar La Lucha was; indeed, the ruckus over the watch was as much about Cruz being an undeclared *fichador* as it was about the theft, suggesting the men were at least in part duped to stay longer than they would have had they known they were being played and plied with conversation and drinks. *El Popular*'s only answer to this question was that the men were seeking a night on the town where they could forget their troubles. Yet, of all the places that could be chosen, why La Lucha? Plenty of establishments offered *ficheras*, actual prostitutes, stiff drinks, or a variety of other attractions that would suit a man who could afford an expensive watch. Were the men "duped" (or exploited as social reformers feared would happen)? While *El Popular* did not question the men's motivations for casting caution to the wind in a bar where there were appealing and attractive young men with whom to have an engaging conversation, *Excelsior* bluntly reported on the cantina's *ambiente*. At La Lucha, an "infamous cabaret" where "instead of waitresses, suspicious individuals attend to the clientele,

⁵² David Lida, *First Stop in the New World: Mexico City, the Capital of the 21st Century* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2008), 79. According to Lida, *ficheras* still exist in Mexico City today.

⁵³ This possibility was immortalized in the *fichera* film genre of the 1970s, which were part of a trajectory in film that had its origin in the "mythology of the prostitute" and the perceived sexual availability of prostitutes and *ficheras*. See especially chapters one and three of Sergio de la Mora, *Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006).

⁵⁴ His presence in the bar may have stemmed in part from restrictions placed periodically on women serving in bars, as described in Chapter 5, as much as queer demand.

made-up like women,” truly “shameful scenes” could be seen, and the “subjects caked with makeup dance with the patrons and rob them.”⁵⁵ In other words, it was clear what type of bar La Lucha actually was, and the men were seeking adventure there because of its liminal space.

Moreover, the phrase *lanzar una cana al aire* could also have an adulterous or sexualized connotation, insofar as married men sought interactions with *ficheras* or others on the sly, away from their families; such adventures were precisely one of the concerns that the vice raids were meant to address. Thus, exactly what kind of “seductive conversation” was really going on that was so interesting to the men that they not only drank heavily but they had unguarded moments in which a watch could disappear? What kind of fling were they hoping to actually have?

Jesús Cruz admitted at his detention that the bar paid him, “like others of his kind,” to serve as a *fichador* and that he earned twenty-five centavos for each drink his clients bought. Like a *fichera*, he also danced with clients, including Carlos. Such intimacy during Canto Prado’s “careless moment,” the claim went, gave Cruz the opportunity to steal the watch. Cruz denied the charge, stating that “crime was foreign to him.”⁵⁶ He also asserted his masculinity, despite his job as a *fichero*, “stating, without beating around the bush, that he was a real man.” *El Popular* made no mention of Cruz being an *afeminado*—or any other *ficheros* dressing or appearing as women. Instead, the “new and curious system of exploitation” was one through which “certain talented individuals”—such as Cruz—“can earn money in the cantinas, without the necessity of wearing skirts nor exposing oneself to audacious things.”⁵⁷ *El Popular*’s account of La Lucha and its employees, then, focused on the “curious” ways that men interacted with

⁵⁵ “Vergonzosas escenas se ven en un cabaret de ínfima categoría, denominado 'La Lucha',” 1.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ “Nuevo y curioso sistema de explotación descubierto en una cantina del D.F.,” 4.

each other, suggesting that the bar and Cruz, a “tavern lecturer” (*charlista de taberna*), exploited men who sought homosocial comradeship in cantinas.⁵⁸

However, given the accounts in *Excelsior* on the same day, as well as later police reports and other newspaper accounts that commented directly on how at least some of the *ficheros* appeared in the cantina, skepticism must be directed at the “innocence” of either Cruz or Canto Prado and his friend, in so far as the motivations for their interaction are concerned. The men danced together, after all. In addition, documents leave little question that La Lucha employed men who attended to patrons while dressed in drag. Canto Prado and his friend knew what kind of bar they were entering, and alcohol was a convenient means of facilitating or justifying a homosexual fling. His assertion that Cruz robbed him may have contained an expression of “buyer’s remorse” or “homosexual panic” at having shared intimacy with another man and having become “vulnerable” to the game, whether or not it included actual theft. It was also a way to deflect his own culpability as a “degenerate” who sought La Lucha’s forbidden pleasures.

As for Cruz, some speculation on his motives are also in order. He may have simply seized an opportunity to make money with his conversational skills and his attractive comportment in an environment in which they would earn significant interest from men, whether platonic or sexual. Or, he may have shared some interest in men beyond a monetary transaction. While being a *fichero* did not necessarily mean he was required to offer sex, the possibility that some connection might happen was part of the tease to keep men’s interest. If, as *El Popular* suggested and Cruz asserted, he was not one of the men wearing makeup and acting as a waitress, then the interaction between him and Canto Prado is even more interesting, as it

⁵⁸ Cruz’s particular appeal was his conversational skills and gentlemanly demeanor; in an interesting way, he was a real-world parallel to a *lucha libre exótico*, a cantina version of Gardenia Davis, a refined male who both asserted his masculinity while also playing with stereotypes of the dandy in his interactions with other men.

provides evidence of two ostensibly masculine-identified men dancing together publicly in a busy cantina. On the other hand, if he was instead wearing makeup like the “suspicious individuals” cited by *Excelsior*, then his defense of his masculinity echoed efforts by other young men to deflect the stigma associated with homosexual stereotypes and male effeminacy, particularly as he would have been the “effeminate” individual of the pairing.⁵⁹

In the end, the claims made by Canto Prado against Cruz alerted the police, courts, press, and public about the “exploitation” occurring at La Lucha and in the bar’s *ambiente*. Cruz’s mother, Manuela García Martínez, asserted in her deposition to the police that minors entered the bar. Her son was one, and he was only fifteen, not seventeen as Cruz claimed.⁶⁰ In either case, he was a minor, and he was remitted to the Tribunal de Menores. Even worse than the presence of youths in the bar was the fact that “the clients make love with the referenced *homo-sexuales* and dance with each other executing acts provoking the derision of those present.”⁶¹ García Martínez’s claims thus implicated the bar as a “nauseating center of vice,” its proprietor, Willebaldo Bañuelos, and his employees in the crime of “corruption of minors.”⁶² Cruz’s own “confessions” about his employment made during his interrogation was further evidence that Bañuelos had violated portions of articles 201-202 of the 1931 Código Penal; since Cruz was exposed to sexual depravation and himself showed some signs of such deviancy in his work, the

⁵⁹ Consider, for example, the efforts that youths in the Belén prison took to assert their masculinity vis a vis their peers and the questions asked by Carlos Roumagnac. See Chapter 2.

⁶⁰ Perhaps his mother sought to lower his age so as to make it possible to avoid sentencing as an adult and to gain him the possibilities of “reform” that the Tribunal offered, as well as help put La Lucha out of business.

⁶¹ “Case 861/1182: Rafael Escobedo González” (Departamento del Distrito Federal, February 12, 1945), AHDF, Cárceles, Lecumberri.

⁶² “Vergonzosas escenas se ven en un cabaret de ínfima categoría, denominado 'La Lucha',” 1.

penalty that Bañuelos faced would have been increased to five to ten years and a fine of twenty-five thousand pesos.⁶³

Judicial Police soon closed the bar. According to press reports, police arrested twenty-eight individuals, although these arrests did not include Bañuelos, who escaped before the police arrived.⁶⁴ His clients and employees were not so lucky. One woman, who arrived with a male client, “cried with rage” as they hauled her off to the precinct. Eventually, police released most of the group, but at least seven “abnormal individuals” were consigned to judicial authorities.⁶⁵

Police, upon entering the bar, found “*afeminados* dancing happily with the habitual clients of this den of vice and degeneration.”⁶⁶ The men, who the press quickly labeled as “depraved,” were “grotesquely painted,” and “caked with makeup like women.” Many of the *afeminados* “were adorned with ornamental combs and pendant earrings and had their lips painted in the shape of a heart.” They also used monikers such as “La María Félix,” “Carmina,” “María Teresa,” “Mapy,” and “other feminine names” as part of their personas.⁶⁷ In fact, reported *El Universal*, the men were known “more for their nicknames than for their names.” some of which, like “María Félix,” were named for “cinema and radio artists.”⁶⁸

A few inconsistencies exist in the press reports. For example, *El Universal* offered a different set of names than *Excelsior*, with only “La Mapy” and “María Félix” appearing in both; the others mentioned by *El Universal* included “Marilu,” “la Coquis,” “la Gitana,” “la Rorra,”

⁶³ *Código penal para el Distrito y Territorios Federales: Ley orgánica y normas de procedimiento de los tribunales para menores.*, 10th ed. (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Porrúa, S.A., 1966).

⁶⁴ It appears that he was arrested about a month later on corruption of minors and moral outrages charges and again in April 1945 for the same charges. Since the files on him are paltry, further effort will be needed to see if he actually faced the penalties as specified in the Penal Code. See “Case 865/1519: Guilebaldo Bañuelos Benítez” (Departamento del Distrito Federal, March 1, 1945) and “Case 874/3270: Wilebaldo Bañuelos Benítez,” (Departamento del Distrito Federal, April 13, 1945) in AHDF, Carceles, Lecumberri.

⁶⁵ “Centro de vicio clausurado ayer,” *Excelsior*, February 9, 1945, sec. 2, 9. Court documents discussed below suggest the number was closer to ten.

⁶⁶ “Cierra la policía un centro de afeminados,” 1.

⁶⁷ “Centro de vicio clausurado ayer,” 9.

⁶⁸ “Cierra la policía un centro de afeminados,” 1.

and Doña Papada.”⁶⁹ Either the names were incorrectly reported, or there were more than seven *afeminados* arrested, a possibility suggested by the court files. In addition, it was unclear whether *all* of the *ficheros* used feminine personas or whether interactions with clientele were organized along a heteronormative, masculine/feminine paradigm; after all, the articles in *El Popular* did not describe Jesús Cruz as an *afeminado*, and he himself asserted that he was a “real man.”

What these reports and court documents show is that the bar catered to men seeking other men, many of whom were “habitual clients” and others like Canto Prado who were attracted to its *ambiente*. Those that worked there enjoyed their jobs and had been specifically hired to work as servers and *ficheros*; many crafted personas that incorporated feminine appearances and nicknames, which appealed to their patrons, while others played up their youthful masculinity. These attributes facilitated their presence in a space normally reserved by women and to “replace” female waitresses. What made La Lucha special was that it was not a mixed-use space like El Tenampa; it was instead a bar de *ambiente*, one of the earliest for which there is a record.

Appeals and Judgments: Homosexual Citizens, Moral Outrages, and Corruption of Minors

After the raid, at least six of the men ended up in prison and were processed on February 12. Two of the men sent to the Lecumberri prison were Rafael Escobedo González and Carlos Benítez Cruz; if they were among the men who had nicknames and were described in the newspaper accounts, their case files offer no indication. On February 13, five days after the raid, the two men sent a letter to judicial authorities, appealing their situation and requesting the rights of *amparo* and protection “against the authorities”, specifically the Eighth Judge of the Third Penal Court and the Director of Lecumberri Penitentiary. The men rejected the charges—

⁶⁹ Ibid.

corruption of minors and outrages against public morality—under which they had been imprisoned, stating that these men

had deprived us of our freedom without these [charges] being proved, nor the body of the crimes enunciated, nor did sufficient facts exist for [the authorities] to presume our criminal responsibility in the criminal acts that they impute to us.⁷⁰

Such claims had done “irreparable harm” to both men, according to their letter. And, the judge had not “taken into account the circumstances of the case” and had instead dictated imprisonment that the prison director then “continued carrying out,” thereby violating the guarantees specified in articles 14, 16, and 19 in the 1917 Mexican constitution.

The specific sections to which the men referred dealt with the rights individuals had vis-à-vis the government and its agents, such as the police and judicial authorities. Article 14 promised that all persons punished under the law were entitled to due process and that punishments had to follow what was dictated by written law, rather than the whims of the presiding judge. Article 16, in turn, promised among other rights that “no one shall be molested in their person, family, domicile, papers, or possessions, except in light of a written statement from a competent authority that establishes and brings about the legal cause of the proceedings.” Article 19 prohibited detention in excess of 72 hours without formal charges and again asserted the right of the accused to due process, as well as the requirement that separate charges discovered under an investigation be brought separately.

Juan José González Bustamante, Second Judge of the Federal District in Penal Matters took their case. On February 15, 1945 he ordered authorities to justify Escobedo’s and Benítez’s detention, which they did with a brief statement on February 17. Then on February 20, 1945, González Bustamante ruled that the men be given provisional freedom, provided that make bail,

⁷⁰ “Case 861/1182: Rafael Escobedo González.”

that they presented themselves before the judge once a week and when otherwise required to do so, that they advise him on any address changes, and that they were forbidden to leave the city without his permission. By February 26, Benítez had paid his bail; likewise, Escobedo paid his by March 2, and González ordered them released according to his previous statement.⁷¹

Unfortunately for the men, González ultimately denied their *amparo* request in April 1945 and upheld the initial charges. González reasoned that no violations had occurred against the men's constitutional rights because ample evidence existed of what kind of bar La Lucha was and what the men's role there had been. Such evidence was largely based on interviews with the other men who were arrested, as well as with Manuela García Martínez, Jesús Cruz's mother. On the corruption of minors charge, González asserted that both Rafael Escobedo and Carlos Benítez were "part of a group of *afeminados*" who were *ficheros* at La Lucha who had sex and danced with clients, thereby "provoking the derision of those present." According to the court documents elaborating the charges against the men,

Such acts clearly, and through the intentions with which they were carried out, were designed to awaken the sexual appetites among those present and that, being unnatural, contrary to morality and the public order, induced the corruption of the visitors, whether older or younger than eighteen years old, according to the records of the proceedings.⁷²

As such, neither Escobedo nor Benítez had grounds to challenge their arrest. Likewise, González concluded that the charge of *ultrajes a la moral pública* was merited, stating that both men, like the others who had been arrested, had committed such outrages, consisting of

making love with one another with the aim of obtaining their seduction, they are characteristically obscene and aimed at obtaining a profit, and such activity constituted a carnal commerce and way of life for the stated individuals.⁷³

⁷¹ "Case 861/1182: Rafael Escobedo González"; "Case 861/1183: Carlos Benítez Cruz" (Departamento del Distrito Federal, February 12, 1945), AHDF, Cárceles, Lecumberri.

⁷² "Case 861/1182: Rafael Escobedo González." González Bustamante delivered the ruling on April 13, 1945.

⁷³ Ibid.

For González, then, the men's responsibility for the crimes had been sufficiently proven, and the government would not protect them against being formally imprisoned. Remarkably, the case did not conclude with the judge's ruling. Most case files on homosexuals include little more than details of their crimes and the punishments levied against them, showing how homosexuals did not challenge the charges or did not have the resources to contest them. Both Escobedo and Benítez, however, pursued their case further in a reply to González on April 30, 1945. They denied having been among the *afeminados* who worked as *ficheros* at the La Lucha and committing the alleged acts stated in the charges. Again, they insisted their constitutional rights had been violated, and they asserted their right of appeal to the Suprema Corte de Justicia, Mexico's Supreme Court, an appeal with which González complied.

The Suprema Corte de Justicia released a detailed evaluation of the case and the appeals of both Escobedo and Benítez against the rulings of lower courts in October 1945.⁷⁴ As part of their analysis, they considered evidence absent from the other documents: for the first time, both men "confessed to be 'homo-sexuales' from birth." However, rather than being arrested at the bar itself that they denied attending, Escobedo and Benítez were found by police at one of their homes in each others' arms. In other words, the roundup was more extensive than either the press or previous documents had indicated and, if the men's claim was accurate, it was a screen for taking in men unconnected to the scandal at the bar. And, argued the men, they could not have committed "outrages against public morality" because they were not in public. As to the corruption of minors charge, they again denied the claim, stating that the State had not made its case, both because it lacked sufficient evidence and the presence of minors in the bar was not proof that the two men were involved in their corruption.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

The Court's reaction was mixed. On the corruption of minors charge, a majority of three judges agreed with Escobedo and Benítez, offering the men protection from authorities who had sentenced them; in the opinion of the higher court, which echoed the accused men's argument, simply being present in such a bar was not sufficient grounds to claim that minors had been corrupted.⁷⁵ However, the Court disagreed with their argument against the moral outrages charge and upheld their sentence. The result was that the men remained imprisoned, and they were still in prison in June 1946 on the *ultrajes a la moral* charge, even as the corruption of minors charge had been dropped. The mixed ruling marked a small shift in the way that homosexuality was viewed legally. While "public outrages" remained something through which homosexuals could be criminalized for their behavior, appearance, or physical location, corruption of minors required a higher burden of proof, i.e., actual evidence that a youth had been induced into behaviors. The implication, then, was that homosexuality could not simply be transmitted through proximity. However, "public" crimes could still occur if the police entered a residence and discovered homosexual activity, and police could act with impunity on moral outrages charges, including by invading the home.

The case files also offer a small glimmer into how the men thought about themselves and their relationship. First, the men asserted they were homosexual from birth, a claim supporting both an identity based on their sexuality and ideas of homosexuality as an inherent quality they possessed.⁷⁶ This is important, not only because it provides another example of homosexuals thinking about their sexuality as an integral part of their identity, but also because the men defended their sexuality in a legal setting by asserting it was not incompatible with citizenship. It

⁷⁵ A fourth judge voted against any protection, and a fifth was absent.

⁷⁶ Their claim to have not danced or slept with men might also mean they considered each other something other than a "real man," i.e., that they had adopted the idea of being "homo-sexual" as something distinct.

would seem, then, that this was an example of a homosexual couple arguing together before the court. Second, the men appear to have been versatile in their sexual interests, if any credence is given to the evaluation conducted by the prison's medical section that revealed that both showed "signs of passive pederasty."⁷⁷ This complicates the idea that working-class men necessarily based their sexual interests along gendered lines, a claim supported by the interactions between Cruz and Canto Prado above. That both men were housed in the same cell-block in prison, one designated for obvious homosexuals, corroborates the likelihood of their sexual versatility.⁷⁸

Triumph of the State?

Initially, the men whom police rounded up in that early February morning were housed in cellblocks "G" and "H" in Lecumberri prison. Then on February 15, while already in the penitentiary and a full week after their arrest, at least six of the arrested men—Carlos Benítez Cruz, Rafael Escobedo González, Manuel Doblanza Cabrera, Francisco Hernández Camacho, Angel Rosas Ugarte, and Manuel Ortega González—underwent physical examinations conducted by the prison's medical surgeons; this may have occurred as a group, as they were listed in the same report. All were deemed to show "clinical signs of passive pederasty," and

⁷⁷ "Case 861/1183: Carlos Benítez Cruz."

⁷⁸ Another man rounded up during the raid—Manuel Ortega González—also challenged his arrest and the charges against him. On February 28, he wrote to Judge González Bustamante asserting his own rights and requested *amparo*; the format of his letter suggests that he may have had similar legal representation for his claim. Like Escobedo and Benítez, he claimed that authorities had deprived him of his freedom and lacked sufficient evidence to hold him further.⁷⁸ It is possible that Escobedo and Benítez's case had influenced him (since he was arrested at the same time and housed with the men), as well as authorities. When Ortega had secured bail, he was ordered released on March 1, 1945 by the Eighth Judge of the Third Penal Court. A day later, the Judge González Bustamante ordered his provisional freedom as a reply to the *amparo* letter. It seems that Ortega remained free rather than facing further hearings like Escobedo and Benítez. It is possible that this occurred because of a confusion over his name—in various documents, he was listed as Ochoa Ortega instead of Ortega González—and because González Bustamante decided not to pursue the matter as Ortega had already been released. See "Case File 861/1179: Manuel Ortega González," February 2, 1945, Cárceles, Lecumberri, AHDF. The file provides three separate names for him, the other being Ochoa Ortega and González Ortega. I am going with the name on the actual file cover, both to cite it as found and to keep clarity in the text. The divergent names seem to be errors committed by those recording information about the case, and caused some confusion at the time.

although what constituted such signs was not discussed, their invocation showed the continued relevance of somatic signs for identifying homosexuality.⁷⁹ Because of this, the men were transferred to cellblock “J” where other homosexual men—known as the *jotos*—were housed.⁸⁰

Two other men in the arrested group—Juan José González Arias and José Luís Valdéz Alanis—apparently did not either show such signs or were not examined at the same time; perhaps these were *pederastas activos* or men more masculine in bearing than the others.⁸¹ Valdéz Alanis initially was housed in cellblock “H”, then transferred to cellblock “G”; on March 7 1945, he was transferred again to “B” in order to be commissioned as a gardener for the prison. Two days later, the prison’s commandant received a solicitation asking that Valdez be made a bootblack (*bolero*) at the prison hair salon, suggesting that Valdez already had a trade or perhaps hoped to work his way up to the position as a barber or stylist. However, his request was denied as he was already “occupied in the plaza.”⁸²

What became of the remainder of the men arrested that February morning? Several received their freedom by paying bail. One of the first was Angel Rosas Ugarte, who paid 1500 pesos bail on March 7, 1945. However, his probation was revoked in June of that year and he was returned to the prison on the basis of the same charges of corrupting minors and outrages

⁷⁹ “Case 861/1183: Carlos Benítez Cruz.” This examination was conducted even as such “signs” had been challenged by scientists for decades as legitimate proof of homosexuality; in addition, the length of time between the arrest and the examination raises further questions on the veracity of the examination.

⁸⁰ It is possible that the legend about the term *joto* referring to this cellblock thus began sometime between the early 1930s and 1945 (and may have transferred over from the Carmen jail). Living in the cellblock was not always easy, however, as twenty year-old Antonio Miguel Java committed suicide there in August 1945. He was a homosexual man, orphaned by his parents and brought under the purview the Tribunal, then was an inmate on numerous occasions in Lecumberri, where he was known to be aggressive. See “En su celda se ahorcó con el cinturón un reo,” *El Nacional*, August 10, 1945, sec. 2, 4.

⁸¹ Both appear to be part of the same group that was arrested at La Lucha or in the surrounding area, given the numbers under which their case files were organized. Unfortunately González Arias’s file offers no information on where he was housed in the prison, nor what sort of investigations might have been conducted. See “Case 861/1176: Juan José González Arias” (Departamento del Distrito Federal, February 2, 1945), Cárceles, Lecumberri, AHDF.

⁸² “Case 861/1181: José Luís Valdéz Alanis” (Departamento del Distrito Federal, February 2, 1945), Cárceles, Lecumberri, AHDF.

against public morality. He was then released again in September 1945 on 100 pesos bail.⁸³

Valdéz and González Arias were released in April 1945 and August 1945 respectively, although the former's freedom was revoked on April 25 after he apparently admitted committing the crimes of *corrupción de menores* and *atentados al pudor*.⁸⁴ Manuel Doblanza Cabrera (alias Juan Jiménez Santos) was released on provisional status on November 10, 1945 after paying 1000 pesos in bail.⁸⁵ In contrast, Francisco Hernández Camacho remained in prison until he could pay a fifty peso bail in June 1946.⁸⁶

Yet, why were these men released when Escobedo and Benítez remained in prison? Was it due to their challenges against the sentence and the notoriety their case generated by making it to the highest court? By calling attention to themselves, it seems that they had ensured that should they lose—which they did—they would spend the allotted time in prison, despite having committed no more grave a crime than did their comrades and even though they appear to have had more resources for their defense than their counterparts. They won part of their case by a successful appeal to their constitutional rights and requirements that put the burden of proof on those who had accused them of crimes, but their status as citizens was limited by biases that still made private sexual behavior public—and therefore something that could be penalized.

In the aftermath of the raid, *El Universal* remarked that it had been “unofficially” told that the arrested *afeminados* would be sent to the Islas Marías penal colony. Two days after the raid, a *cuerda* was indeed sent to the islands full of those who constituted “a great social danger”,

⁸³ “Case 861/1777: Angel Rojas Ugarte” (Departamento del Distrito Federal, February 12, 1945), AHDF, Cárceles, Lecumberri.

⁸⁴ “Case 861/1176: Juan José González Arias”; “Case 861/1181: José Luís Valdéz Alanis.”

⁸⁵ “Case 861/1778: Manuel Doblanza Cabrera” (Departamento del Distrito Federal, February 12, 1945), AHDF, Cárceles, Lecumberri.

⁸⁶ “Case 861/1180: Francisco Hernández Camacho” (Departamento del Distrito Federal, February 12, 1945), AHDF, Cárceles, Lecumberri. The difference seems to stem from the amount of time it took a man to pay off the fine, which would decrease over time in prison.

including murderers, drug traffickers, and professional criminals.⁸⁷ Among these were included those condemned for “sexual inversion.”⁸⁸ The presence of homosexuals in the *cuerda* demonstrates that homosexuals continued to be considered among the worst criminals and worthy of exile and that federal power continued to be exerted against homosexuals through the denial of rights. However, the men relegated in that chain-gang did not likely include those arrested in the raid on La Lucha, as these were not formally processed into Lecumberri prison until February 12, 1945. *El Universal*’s claim, then, seems designed to stoke the fires of relegation against the men, and it had weight insofar as the penal colony remained a favored place to effect social and sexual reforms.

III. Case Study: Working Class Homosexuality, State Interventions, and the Press at El Dragón de Oro, 1947

The case files from the raid on the La Lucha bar offer several insights into the *ambiente* and the role of men in working-class neighborhoods within that homosexual social sphere. La Lucha was not unique in being a bar in such a neighborhood that catered to the *ambiente*. Nor would it be the last to be raided, as city and national officials made repeated attempts to extend their moralizing campaigns throughout the remainder of the decade.

In late March 1947 Fernando Casas Alemán, then chief of the Departamento del Distrito Federal, and other officials prohibited further licensing and authorization of new centers of vice, including cantinas, cabarets, *cervecerías* (beer pubs) and *pulquerías* (bars that specialized in *pulque*). According to the new rules, those establishments closed during the raids on the grounds of violations could not be reopened. Such measures were taken as around 200 establishments

⁸⁷ “Sale hoy una cuerda para las Islas Marías,” *Novedades*, February 10, 1945, sec. 2, 1; “Salieron 142 reos en la ‘cuerda’ a las Islas Marías,” *Novedades*, February 11, 1945, sec. 2, 4; “142 reclusos a Islas Marías,” *El Universal*, February 11, 1945, sec. 2, 1, 16.

⁸⁸ “Una cuerda a Islas Marías,” *El Universal*, February 10, 1945, sec. 2, 1, 16.

operated illegally. Both police and authorities asked for “the cooperation of the District’s judges” and other functionaries who, from their perspective, too often granted the *amparo* rights to those committing violations and dedicated to “exploiting the vices.” Such support was crucial in “treating” the problem of vice that “seriously threatened” the capital. In addition, a related campaign targeted illegal gaming establishments and brothels; these “ladies bars” and cabarets with *fichadoras* and *divertadoras* plied their customers through subterfuge, masking their real exploitative aims with attractive women, much like La Lucha had done with men.⁸⁹

As in the similar raids in February 1945, roundups of homosexuals formed part of the overall effort at reducing vice in the city. On April 2, 1947, twenty-five men, perhaps more, met at the corner of Mineros and Carpinteros streets in Mexico City’s Tepito neighborhood, a “rough” area known for its open-air markets, tenement buildings, and crime. The men had converted a *corralón* into a dancing salon.⁹⁰ Many of them came dressed in women’s clothing; some even “dressed only in lingerie [and] performed bataclanesque dances while the other attendees sang in unison.”⁹¹ As too often happened when *afeminados* fashioned a festive atmosphere for themselves, police raided the party, consigned the men to the Carcél del Carmen and closed the salon.⁹²

It might seem ironic that the men were arrested at the corner of Mineros and Carpinteros streets, two professions associated with working-class masculinity and manual labor, rather than

⁸⁹ “No se autorizará la apertura de más centros de vicio en el Distrito Federal,” *El Popular*, March 31, 1947, 1.

⁹⁰ In many dictionaries, the term *corralón* means an impoundment lot used by police. However, another meaning in Mexico is a place where random stuff is stored, such as a warehouse. It is this second definition that I build upon below, as the place was most likely a general store (the *estanco* mentioned in articles described below) that sold random items during the day and that was converted into the dance parlor at night. As I describe below, the site was not open-air, but had walls and a ceiling, and thus, reading it as an urban lot is incorrect.

⁹¹ Note the continuing significance of the Bataclan in describing homosexuals and cabaret-style behaviors.

⁹² “Veinticinco tipos equivocados presos en el Carmen ayer,” *El Nacional*, April 4, 1947, sec. 2, 4. *El Nacional*, pronounced the men *tipos equivocados*, literally “equivocal types,” referencing both their sexual ambiguity as somewhere between men and women, as well as their “mistaken” behaviors.

the Bataclán-style follies and festive sing-alongs taking place that night. Yet, Tepito, like Obrera to the south, was one of several working-class neighborhoods in which non-heteronormative sexualities flourished. When “discovered,” these sites proved a source of intense interest, especially for the tabloids, raising the question of just who—the *afeminados*, the journalists who wrote about them, or the readers who devoured the stories—was truly “perverse.”

A Night in Colonia Morelos at El Dragón de Oro

Sometime before the raid, Journalist Paulino Ek took a stroll with his friend Vereo Arrieta (and a photographer) on a gloomy night through the “streets of God” in seedy Colonia Morelos. As they walked, they came upon a bar whose noise “disturbed” the “tranquility” along Mineros street. Light also spilled into the street from the establishment at the “cabalistic number 41.” At the door, two girls talked, and upon seeing the men, one approached Vereo and with “sugary words” invited him inside. Ek followed them into El Dragón de Oro:

There were lots of ugly ornaments hanging from the ceiling; on the walls there were color images, reproduced in color lithographs, of complete nudes. Several couples chatted happily at the tables.⁹³

A jukebox played music as people danced. The party headed to a corner where they could see the whole bar and took a seat. One of the girls turned to Vereo and said, “I am ‘La Marilu’, here to serve you in whatever you desire to command. Don’t you want to buy us a beer?” To Ek, Marilu’s voice, which had earlier been mellifluous, was a “siren song mixed with the howl of a wolf.” And that’s when the recognition set in: “in the half light that there was in the bar, we realized that we were dealing with two *invertidos* and the other pairs were the same.” They had

⁹³ Paulino Ek, “Cabaret de homosexuales,” *Magazine de Policía*, April 21, 1947, 4. Given that there were images of nudes here too, as they had been in Juanita’s residence, it points to the circulation of nude male forms in the period at a level previously unexplored.

been duped! But instead of running out, Ek stated that “we had no other choice but to stay, either out of curiosity or so as not to spurn them, as that is paid there with a knife to the belly.”⁹⁴

What a remarkable claim. Ek craftily used a blend of innocence—as if he was unaware of what kind of bar El Dragón de Oro really was—and intelligence—insofar as he picked up on the game far earlier than poor Vereo—to weave his story. Thus he encrusted his writing with stereotypes: that the “girls” could dupe unsuspecting men into their clutches with mellifluousness that would change once they had caught someone and that if they were spurned, they would turn violent and commit a crime of passion. Rather than weak homosexuals who would meekly turn from confrontation, the homosexuals at El Dragón de Oro were of the same stripe as El Barragón a decade before: tough and willing to go after what they wanted, or so Ek led his readers to believe.

El Dragón de Oro was the salon raided in early April that I described above. Like some of its patrons, the bar itself lived a double life—an “honorable” general store during the day that converted into a homosexual cabaret by night.⁹⁵ This “Cabaret de Homosexuales” made the cover of *Magazine de Policía*, and was, according to Ek, a favorite meeting spot for members of the “third sex” who were “dressed like the most appealing ‘girl’ of Fifth Avenue,” which established its transnational, rather than national, credentials. In addition,

Each one of these persons dances to the sound of the jukebox, accompanied by their partner, who almost always was some degenerate redneck Tarzan (*un tarzán quintopatiero*), as only in this way one can explain that someone that considers himself as a person with principles could go to these places to dance with men dressed as women.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ The word used is *estanco*, a store selling general items. Regulars called the bar “El Corralito,” (The Playpen or Little Corral); this double entendre referenced both the site’s characteristic of being a general store/warehouse, as well as a place for homosexuals to play.

⁹⁶ The juxtaposition of “Fifth Avenue” and the “fifth patio” (*quintopatiero*) is striking, encapsulating a critique of the high and low class of people that attended there. That is, from the Fifth Avenue to the fifth patio.

El Dragón de Oro thus was “a dump of degenerates where no one knows who is whom” and “nobody knows with whom (or to whom) to lose it.” That is, a person would now know what they would end up doing there, and with whom, nor who other patrons or the bars workers actually were.⁹⁷

That’s precisely what happened to his friend Vereo. Marliu called out to the bar’s owner Severino ordering four beers. He then whisked Vereo onto the dance floor, who “still hadn’t realized he was dealing with a homosexual”—he would only realize he was with another man while dancing. Marilu could pass as a woman: “He wore flowery organdy. His made-up face gave us the impression of being in front of a true woman. He was a beardless youth, almost a boy.” At once Ek and his companion “felt compassion for him” and also “wanted to move away from this infectious place, but curiosity held us back.” As Vereo danced with Marilu, Ek talked with another *afeminado* named La Mimosa, a boy of around sixteen, of chestnut brown hair, large eyes, and fat lips. He had an oval-shaped face and a turned up nose, and his “hair was recently done-up, appearing as is he had just left the hair salon.” In this way, Ek’s description of the scene was laden with the very sort of fascination with perversity that sold magazines, while also straying very close to admiration at the success the young men had in fashioning their looks, almost as if he wanted to pimp them to the reader.

La Mimosa was a clever youth, and he realized that Ek and the others did not want to be there. At first self-conscious, he loosened-up after the beer. And if Ek faithfully reported what he said, it is rather remarkable:

I myself am ashamed of what I do, but an impulse...makes me commit these acts. You do not know how I suffer to hear, when I walk down the street, that they say: there goes a

⁹⁷ The phrase *donde nadie sabe con quién es quién, ni nadie sabe con quién la pierde* could be a sly reference to sexuality, as in one would not know to whom one would “lose it” sexually.

joto. It hurts my soul when they laugh at me. Will there ever be a medicine that cures this malady, because it is actually a very serious disease.

Taking another beer, he continued:

I went to ruin having joined with other boys that suffered from this disease. I had to leave the school where I studied and gradually was falling into vice. I am actually a great shame for my family, but what am I going to do? God made me this way and this path I will follow. I don't know how to work. I am already used to this life.

As he spoke these words, according to Ek, "copious tears ran from his eyes."

Were these La Mimosa's actual words? We cannot know for sure. Certainly, Ek sought to fulfill another stereotype that functioned as an integral part of the discourse on youth homosexuality: that of the fallen youth who could be redeemed. Indeed, La Mimosa had only been involved in the *ambiente* a short time and Ek believed he could be "regenerated;" the others, in contrast, had been infected by "the virus of pederasty" all the way to their brain.⁹⁸

We have to be skeptical about the redemptive vision Ek offered, if only to examine La Mimosa's purported words more clearly and not unquestioningly accept a story that suited social norms. At face value, La Mimosa's words are devastating: he faced ridicule for what he was, felt shame about what he did, and believed he was afflicted. Yet, he also blamed God for making him as he was and asserted he would follow the path. He thus expressed the sort of feelings that homosexuals often did in hostile cultures, a blend of internalized shame and defiance stemming from a belief in the immutable nature of their inclinations.

Ek consciously compared La Mimosa to La Marilu. While the latter flirted with Vereo, caressed him and begged him for anise liquor in order to forget his cares, La Mimosa sipped his beer with "sadness," "pain," and "despair" in his face. While one played up his performance and wanted to forget, the other brooded on his situation, saying there was no hope, as everyone laughed at him and the others like him, and the police persecuted him.

⁹⁸ Specifically the medulla oblongata.

Perhaps even more surprisingly, and again we should be critical, La Mimosa made a class critique in his comments, condemning the men who came to slum at El Dragón de Oro:

There are well-dressed people, who occupy important jobs, who are also degenerates. By day they are at their job, but when the night comes they come here or to other places where there are groups of people like us.⁹⁹

Such men were hypocrites, unlike La Mimosa and his group, because they “pass as very honorable, but suffer more gravely the disease than us.” In fact, they had to do the “indescribable” to obtain what they desired, gathering robbers and murderers from the “gutter” to satisfy their desires.

There are multiple ways La Mimosa’s story could be read. Ek might have been speaking for or through La Mimosa and expressing common stereotypes that linked wealthy homosexuals in places of importance with crime and depravity. Or, the story may have been authentic and intended to clearly show the difference between “honest” *afeminados*—found in the lower classes—and those who were wealthy, with the latter “hypocrites” due to their dual lives of passing as “honorable” in the day and reveling in depravity at night. While such passing was on one hand a means through which such men could suffer—as they were bounded by hierarchies of honor—it also offered opportunities that La Mimosa and his colleagues could not enjoy, including the potential freedom to appear in public without being openly ridiculed. Passing, then, was more complicated than just a survival skill in part by hierarchical relationships of honor. And a different sort of honor—that of being authentically queer rather than hypocritical—could be found among La Mimosa and his friends. Both types of men, though, went to the El Dragón de Oro because it was a site where men who had the “nerve to dress in women’s clothing, almost publicly” could do so. It served as a site of self-expression for *afeminados*. Even those who felt

⁹⁹ Ibid., 5.

shame like La Mimosa put care into their look, and he was appreciated for his beauty even by a disgusted, presumably straight man.

At a certain point in the evening, someone put another coin in the jukebox. Music filled the bar, and the men returned to the dance floor. The lights changed, from opaline to red, and made it difficult to distinguish others clearly. Men danced, showing off their “perfectly made-up faces,” their “cleavage”—stuffed with sausages so that they would simulate perfect breasts—that threatened to burst through their clothing, and their trendy hairstyles. Trays of liquor and beer passed by—new drinks to replace the multitude of empty bottles on the tables, the consumption of which showed how popular and viable the bar was. One dancer was an “ophidian,” moving with snake-like undulations. Ek critiqued all of this as a “carnival of degeneration,” an “infernal *zarabanda*,” and he wondered how the men could afford their costumes and libations.¹⁰⁰

Yet, in those muted lights and the throws of dancing to the music, men could lose themselves and be whomever they wanted. The “imperfections” in their appearances could be masked, whether they were “ugly” or their appearance was betrayed by their muscular arms or bristly beard through their face powder.¹⁰¹ The idea of carnival thus is apt, not because it was degeneration on display, but because the “natural” order was upended and transgressed by those who had the nerve. So powerful was the experience that men would meet at the bar nightly.

Ek and his friends would eventually leave the bar. His article chastised Severino Olín Guitérrez, the proprietor, for exploiting the *afeminados*, and he mentioned that since he had been there, police had raided the bar (the story that opened this section). Olín would be sent to

¹⁰⁰ A dance in triple meter originating in Latin America that was known at times for its obscenity. Vereos resisted Marilu’s advances for another dance during this carnival, once he recognized where he was.

¹⁰¹ Ek at one point makes a rather racist comment about the ugly ones: “Naturally among these are ugly *afeminados*, that through their makeup shows their Chichimeca faces.” The statement referenced pre-colonial understandings of the Chichimecs being the “barbarians” to the north of the Mexica (Aztec) Empire.

Lecumberri and Marliu was among those rounded up when the bar was closed in April 1945.¹⁰²

Twelve of the men arrested were the partners of the *afeminados*. Photos accompanying Ek's article show others who were arrested, each bearing a nickname. Some, like Carlos Vila Limón (La China or La Caballona) smile at the camera; La Santa (Emilio Coria Cornejo) in contrast, sneered.¹⁰³ One caption asked if the reader could believe that the individual in the photo was truly a man, given his beauty and look. The men would be remitted to the Carmen jail.

El Dragón de Oro was a significant site in the *ambiente* of Mexico City, one in which pleasure and shame, self-recognition and nerve jostled and mixed with each other in a carnivalesque atmosphere. Importantly, it was a working-class venue, another site like La Lucha that catered to men seeking interactions with other men, some who were openly *afeminados* like La Mimosa and others who were not. In his story, we can see more than a longing to be different than he was; instead, we see someone struggling with his sexuality while also embracing certain aspects of its presentation fully and asserting his blamelessness in being *de ambiente*. Details exist on the atmosphere and *ambiente* inside El Dragón de Oro, thanks to Ek's exposé. In these details, which he included to titillate and disgust the reader, he saved an archive of homosexual life in Colonia Morelos, from their dressing styles to evidence that the nude male form circulated in the homosexual community and that there were proprietors willing to live a double life similar to their patrons if it meant earning the business of such enthusiastic revelers. While the bar was shuttered, other sites would also cater to such desires, as the market remained strong, even when numerous patrons were incarcerated for their actions.

¹⁰² It is possible that Ek's story helped precipitate the raid, insofar as he was writing it before the raid and there were lines of communication between the magazine and the police.

¹⁰³ The other nicknames included La Shirley, La Emilia Giu, La Zorra, La Changa, La María Candelaria, La Bizcocho, La Goly, La Doncella, and La Susana. La Emilia Giu should be "Guiú" and refers to a Mexican-Spanish femme fatale of the golden age of Mexican cinema in the 1940s and 1950s. María Candelaria may refer to the 1943 film by the same name by Emilio Fernández starring Dolores del Río. Bizcocho is a name of a flaky pastry. Changa is a term for monkey, while Zorra is a term meaning both "vixen" and "whore."

IV. The *Ambiente*'s Archipelago, Social Histories and Geographies of Homosexuality, 1947-1960

In March 1948, Sergio Fernández lamented in *Suplemento de Policía* about the visibility that *afeminados* had during the just concluded Carnival season. “The *afeminados*,” he wrote,

have achieved such impunity that they no longer hide themselves to commit their misdeeds, and they form circles or clubs in the dance halls in order to receive a trophy as the bearers of the best and most elegant attire.

These competitions were serious, as “there were occasions when spirits exploded and there were bloody frictions, only because the ‘flashy-dressers’ battled for the triumph of their candidate as the best-dressed queen of beauty.”¹⁰⁴ Whether or not the men actually fought as viciously—which could be another example of the stereotype of homosexuals as passionate criminals—it is remarkable that evidence remains of awards given for drag shows.

Such competitions and performances were not limited to the Carnival season. In July 1951 tabloid (*nota roja*) police rag *Alarma* ran a spread of photos of a drag ball, calling the homosexual participants “unhappy.” The photos tell a different story: the participants look quite happy and some smile as they dance in their elaborate, sequined costumes reminiscent of *bataclanismo*. One photo running in the spread shows several men in wigs and swimwear, lingerie, heels, and even stockings. *Alarma*, an even more critical and sensational tabloid than *Magazine de Policía* attacked the “voracious entrepreneurs for whom sexual depravity is ‘another business opportunity’,” asserting that it was on their shoulders that blame for drag balls should be laid.¹⁰⁵

Like Ek in his exposé of El Dragón de Oro, both Fernández and *Alarma* seemed surprised by the visibility of homosexuals and the homosexual “market,” even as they traded on

¹⁰⁴ Fernández, “El descaro de los sodomitas,” 9.

¹⁰⁵ “Infelices homosexuales en danza infernal: Espáculo repugnante,” *Alarma*, July 14, 1951.

homosexuality themselves in their sensational reporting. Homosexuals in the post World War II era were more visible than ever before, and this was due not just to increased reporting or even the amplification of raids (which did occur); instead, it was the willingness of homosexuals and their allies to foster the *ambiente* in more places and to do so more publicly.

The sites described in previous sections of this chapter were among many others that flourished during the mid-twentieth century in the Mexican capital, a period that was a “golden age” in terms of the number of social spaces, their visibility, and the ways in which their use overlapped with larger Mexican social spheres. This queer social world—made of smattering of social sites including bars, parks, and private homes—was also known to mainstream Mexicans, many of whom actively participated in the artistic, bohemian, and social environments it fostered. In addition to sites offering boisterous atmospheres, such as found in La Lucha and El Dragón de Oro, in the 1940s and 1950s, other sites flourished that

offered soft-lighting, drinks and discreet music and an intimate, welcoming environment that attracted a clientele desirous of meeting and gathering together with people of the same sentiments, tastes, and inclinations.¹⁰⁶

These sites became known as *lugares de ambiente*, “maybe because some of them had a special atmosphere, *une ambiance*, as they say in French, and therefore the people that frequented them came to be called *gente de ambiente*.” Among these were artists, bohemians, worldly and cosmopolitan individuals, actors and homosexuals. Together, they shared “a desire to spend a good time in pleasant chat and innocent flirtation and of nourishing the feeling of belonging” in realizing that one was not alone in such interests.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, the *ambiente* was not just a social world for homosexuals by the 1940s and 1950s; it continued to provide liminal spaces in which individuals—both homosexual and straight—could find others who sought an alternative form of

¹⁰⁶ Miko Viya, *México Ayer* (Puebla: Editorial Cajica, S.A., 1988), 183.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

belonging outside of institutionalized norms, only at more venues and more openly than it had in the 1920s and 1930s. In such spaces, homosexual men and women also could find others like them, as well as sympathetic allies among the intelligentsia and artistic classes who went adventuring in these spaces during their search for “authentic” forms of being and identity.

This section offers both an urban geography and social history of some of these sites, as well as evidence on what happened to patrons when they, like those at La Lucha and El Dragón de Oro, faced the police, other authorities, and the press. In addition, this section explores middle-class and upper-class sites that likewise fostered the *ambiente* in which homosexual men could interact in public, whether discreetly or more openly. As in the earlier 1940s, working-class bars often offered a more vibrant form of queer life than did spaces in other neighborhoods in large part due to the way that such sites were situated simultaneously in multiple social spheres. While other queer sites also overlapped with mainstream locations and society, those in working-class areas destabilized the boundaries between classes and genders due to their permissive culture and the possibility that “anything” could happen within their spaces and that the norms were fungible, rather than impermeable. Like the men who in 1945 sought to “let their hair down” in La Lucha in Colonia Obrera, others would seek out working-class bars as sites for self-discovery, entertainment, and sex; all three were also among the reasons that working-class men frequented the bars themselves.

Lascivious Dances at 206 Constantino Street, Apartment 20

In August 1947, efforts continued to “clean-up” Mexico, with a renewed anti-drug and drug trafficking campaign launched by the Secretario de Salubridad y Asistencia and the Procuraduría

General de la República that aimed to end the problem once and for all.¹⁰⁸ In the capital, the anti-vice campaigns initiated the previous spring continued. Fernando Casas Alemán and Antonio Ríos Ibarra, then chief of the Oficina de Reglamentos, launched an “active campaign” against centers of vice where “the regulations are constantly infringed.” More than fifty hotels, cantinas, cabarets, *cervecerías*, *vinaterías*, and *piqueras* were closed during the “prophylactic campaign.”¹⁰⁹ The campaign distinguished between those proprietors that were law-abiding and “honest” and those that refused to pay the appropriate fees, fomented vice, exploited the popular classes, and “poisoned them with brews and toxins”, contributing to their fall into alcoholism.¹¹⁰ Moreover, since many of the sites were owned by “unscrupulous foreigners,” the campaign took on a transnational character, as the state moved to protect the body of the nation and the “humble classes” from foreign contamination, social (and perhaps literal) poisoning, and the fomenting of vice at the hands of those without a nationalist stake in Mexico.

Against this legal and social backdrop—that once again distinguished between those with value in society and those without—raids continued against homosexual men and their meeting places. Establishments frequented by homosexuals or that employed them were by definition vice-laden, illegitimate (if not strictly illegal), and contrary to the national interest. Such locations were believed to “exploit” others and contribute to the degeneration of the Mexican race through sexual and chemical vices.

Shortly after the press announced the anti-vice campaign, forty-three homosexuals were detained on Sunday, August 17, 1947 in a police raid on an apartment in a “house of ill repute”

¹⁰⁸ “Campaña contra el tráfico de los enervantes,” *El Popular*, August 19, 1947, 3.

¹⁰⁹ In Mexico, sites like *cerveceria* or *vinateria* often refer, as in this case, to the sites that sell, rather than make, the alcoholic beverage described in their title (beer for the former, wine for the latter).

¹¹⁰ “Enérgica campaña contra los centros de vicio en el D.F.,” *El Popular*, August 18, 1947. See also “Clausura de cabarets que violan las leyes,” *Excelsior*, August 18, 1947, 20. The unwillingness to pay the fees may have been a prime cause of the raids.

owned by María Antonieta García located at 206 Constantino street, north of the northern terminus of the Paseo de la Reforma and in the Pervaillo neighborhood.¹¹¹ “The immoral subjects dressed in women’s clothes, wore makeup, and many of them...used wigs and other feminine accessories,” reported *El Nacional*.¹¹² More “*bataclanismo*” was clearly on display:

Seven of them, perfectly made-up and dressed as women, with the finest silk clothing, Nylon stockings, and high-heeled, strapped shoes performed lascivious dances, with the audience’s noisy approval, who applauded, shouted, and asked for encores of all the immoral dances.¹¹³

Such parties, according to neighborhood residents, occurred nearly daily, although it was not mentioned whether or not they occurred as part of García’s business or if she was merely the host or friend of those participating and in attendance. In either case, that the party was held at a house of ill-repute—and given the crowd’s enthusiastic response—suggests that there was a market for drag performances and the possibility that such “lascivious dances” were followed by more intimate encounters. In the aftermath, forty-three men and García herself were remitted to the Third Precinct where they were reprimanded with various fines.¹¹⁴

In a different way, the new raids and anti-vice campaign signaled the failure of police and other judicial authorities to stamp out the homosexual social world, even as they continued raiding private parties. Indeed, the raid on the building at 206 Constantino Street revealed that queer burlesque remained *en vogue* among homosexual men, even if not all of the audience members practiced the camp and cross-dressing themselves. The city’s northern working-class

¹¹¹ “Un grupo de amoraes fué aprehendido,” *El Popular*, August 19, 1947, 10. This is the same neighborhood in which “Berta”, the elegantly dressed *afeminado* described in Chapter 2 was beaten in front of the city’s slaughterhouses. The presence of cross-dressing men there forty-five years later suggests that the neighborhood, if not continuously, remained (or was once again) a site in which male cross-dressing occurred and homosexuality was openly expressed.

¹¹² “Detención de homosexuales,” *El Nacional*, August 19, 1947, sec. 2, 4.

¹¹³ “Fiesta de cuarenta pobres degenerados,” *Excelsior*, August 19, 1947, 21.

¹¹⁴ “Un grupo de amoraes fué aprehendido,” 10. See also “Fiesta de cuarenta pobres degenerados,” 21. It’s possible some ended up incarcerated, although if so, they were not prosecuted under the crime of *ultrajes a la moral pública*, according to the Lecumberri records housed in the AHDF. However, *El Nacional* makes this claim. See “Detención de homosexuales,” 4.

neighborhoods also remained popular for *de ambiente* gatherings despite hostility from neighbors who, most likely, had been the source of the information that led to the raid. They would serve as important sites in the homosexual social sphere's archipelago in the decades before the *ambiente* became more concentrated in a new "zone of tolerance," i.e., the Zona Rosa west of the city's center by the 1960s.

Three Raids in November 1951

Frequent reports of police raids on these *de ambiente* establishments suggest that the overall lifespan of many queer-friendly establishments was not long, although some, as described later in this chapter, would flourish for a longer period of time. As in the 1940s, roundups of homosexuals in the 1950s would be justified as part of larger campaigns to "clean up" the city and to protect the general populace, particular youths. And, as in the La Lucha case, anti-vice campaigns and efforts to arrest individuals for *ultrajes a la moral* (moral outrages) and corruption of minors overlapped. Anyone committing a moral outrage—such as the distribution of pornographic materials, the screening of smutty films, or the promotion of sex (whether straight or queer) in cantinas—was also in a position to corrupt youth, since by definition, a moral outrage had to occur in "public". In November 1951, police would simultaneously raid a house—in which pornography and live sex shows were held—and two bars catering to queer men.¹¹⁵ At the pornography house, concerned parents alerted police that their children had been tricked into entering the establishment, suffering "irreparable damage to their mental health."

One of the bars raided that night was the "Canaima," located at José María Izazaga 85, on the south side of the colonia Centro near the intersection with Isabel la Católica. When police from the Servicio Secreto arrived to investigate the activities at the site, they found fifteen

¹¹⁵ "Dos centros de la más inmunda de las obscenidades fueron cerrados," *El Universal*, November 21, 1951, sec. 1.

“individuals of strange customs and plucked eyebrows that were dedicated to dancing with the male clientele of said establishment.” One of the men was seventeen-year-old Domingo Lara Reynoso, known as “La Lola”, who served as the manager of the business. Police took La Lola and the other men into custody, as well as María Isabel Calderón, the wife of the bar’s proprietor who happened to be away at one of his other businesses elsewhere in the country.¹¹⁶ The same night, police raided another bar named “Moctezuma” located at Calle de Anillo de Circunvalación 141, several blocks east of the Canaima near the Merced market. Owner Rafael Farías Espíndola, Juan Farías Ruelas, Rogelio Saavedra Rosales, and Eusebio Farías Ruelas were arrested.¹¹⁷ Before their arrest, Juan, Rogelio, and Eusebio had waited tables and “danced when asked” with the male patrons. Thirty-seven men other men were taken to the precinct, for a total of fifty-two in the two-bar raid. These examples are important because they show that even after other prominent closures of establishments both employing and catering to homosexual men, other venues continued to do so.

In addition, these accounts raise three important points. First, bars were an integral part of the *ambiente*’s public sphere in which there was a demand for spaces in which men could find companionship with other men. The *ficheros*—often, like La Lola, expressing an effeminate persona—were key to the success of the bars. These men served as intermediaries between the queer world and the “normal” world, generating wealth based on interest in the *ambiente* and also serving as carriers—and even conduits—of desires within the bars’ liminal spaces. Given that these bars were located near or in major working-class areas, the clientele included such

¹¹⁶ It is thus possible that he ran another, similar bar in another city.

¹¹⁷ From the last names given, it’s possible that the business was a family affair; Rafael, Juan, and Eusebio, all of them with the name Farías, may have been related, with the latter being potential brothers.

men, while also serving as sites of cross-class and even transnational interaction, as American tourists were also among those arrested during the raid.¹¹⁸

Second, the owners were tolerant enough of homosexuality to both employ queer men and to cater to a clientele interested in the *ambiente*. Their motivations might have been financial, but the benefits of operating such establishments must have outweighed the risks for there to be so many sites to be closed, even after all the public outcry printed in the press. It is possible, then, that the general public was less intolerant than the press or authorities would have us believe and that indifference allowed new spaces to open when previous sites had been closed.

Third, employing La Lola was illegal, as he was under eighteen and involved in behaviors that were considered “corruption of minors.” The risks of employing someone like La Lola were significant, yet the bar took the chance; the payoffs for such employment, then, must have been considered high. And La Lola’s presence is another example of how teenage Mexicans (including those inhabiting roles or identities akin to those expressed by homosexual adults) participated in the *ambiente*, expressing agency in their actions and a recognition of their social value within the homosexual archipelago. This does not discount or diminish the very real ways they could be exploited in sexual commerce.

The Ambiente from Above: Homosexuality Among the Upper-Middle and Wealthy Classes

Certainly, wealthier men also participated in and shaped the *ambiente*. The novel *Los inestables* by Alberto X. Teruel (1968) was one of several novels to discuss homosexuality in mid-century, and it gives insights into elite homosexual practices in the 1950s. One relationship that occurs is between Aldo, a wealthy man with an “athletic and manly” body and who was well versed in the

¹¹⁸ Exchanges between men from both sides of the border were influential on all involved. Indeed, gay identity did not emanate from the US in order to “create” the *ambiente*.

ambiente, and Alberto, a younger man with whom he cultivated friendship and set out to entice into his arms. As part of this process, Aldo took Alberto through an “avalanche of diversions,” the “best of the best” from art shows to concerts to weekend trips to Cuernavaca and Tequesquitengo.¹¹⁹ They dined at the capital’s most elegant restaurants, went to the most luxurious cabarets, and drank in the poshest bars. In the afternoons, they went to the cinema; at night, the theater. On Sundays, toreadors thrilled them, and they would drive through the city in Aldo’s black car. Gradually, they grew closer, spending time in Aldo’s apartment listening to music, talking, and eating together. All were part of Aldo’s plan to seduce the other, and “in this way Alberto encountered and grew used to that part of the city’s lively and noisy life.”¹²⁰

Aldo initially was careful not to include in his whirlwind of seduction places such as La Leda, Los Eloines, La Madreselva or many other fashionable bars, nor did he take him to related sites such as some popular spas, certain of the city’s well-trafficked streets, or the ‘Lobbys’ of certain aristocratic hotels; nor to certain ‘private’ parties, points of reunion for the capital’s homosexual *crème de la crème*, that he frequently visited when he was single and went in search of “easy” adventure, looking for “somebody” with whom to spend the night, of course, all behind Antonio’s back.¹²¹

Why did he not dare to do so? Simply put, it would out him before his seduction was complete, as each of the three bars, as well as the other sites he mentioned, were prominent in the *ambiente* during the period. Indeed,

Had he dared to take him to these ‘prohibited’ places, he could have shown him a very different picture of life in the great city, in which certain beings of special tendencies—his brothers of instinct!—masked there their solitude in search of momentary recreation that they tried to find behind that false happiness that impregnated those obscure buildings, sealed and filled with angst, center of ‘forbidden’ pleasures that attracted him with the force of a magnetism full of depravity, sensuality, and morbidity.

¹¹⁹ Tequesquitengo is a lake in the State of Morelos.

¹²⁰ Alberto X. Teruel, *Los inestables* (Mexico, D.F.: B. Costa-Amic, 1968), 79.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 80.

Not the place one would take an impressionable young man.¹²² Teruel's description, though, captures a sense of the period, offering an insight into what comprised the *ambiente* from above, and how pleasure, pain, and sex converged in the interstitial spaces between fantasy and a reality marked by homophobia. It also provides a segue between the similar feelings of homosexuals at bars in working-class neighborhoods, giving an insight into how cross-class community was and could be formed; if all at some level lived in these interstitial spaces, then recognition could be extended between people on all sides, even if such recognition did not erase all difference.

Slumming: La Leda and Los Eloines

For Aldo, and the men he was intended to represent, one popular nightspot in which to slum by the late 1940s was La Leda, located at Dr. Vértiz 118, near the corner with Dr. Liceaga street, in Colonia Doctores, another working-class neighborhood west of Colonia Obrera and south of the Centro.¹²³ Part of the club's general appeal was a "bizarre combination of people of the highest and most intellectual sort with the neighborhood people who went without complications to enjoy themselves there."¹²⁴ Tourists and travel writers also sought out La Leda, looking for the "authentic" Mexican experience, in part because of the club's popularity with working-class Mexicans.¹²⁵ As Armando Jiménez described,

In this *desveladero* ("sleepless" club) congregated *peladitos* (redneck), construction workers, tailors, mechanics, shoe-shiners and carpenters; even tram drivers after they finished their work and locked their noisy vehicles in the depot nearby.¹²⁶

¹²² At least if one was trying to still cultivate innocence or seduce him.

¹²³ Jiménez, *Sitios de rompe y rasga*, 90. This location is several blocks west of La Lucha. There may have been more sites of *ambiente* in between, as Dr. Liceaga and Lucas Alemán are two names for different parts of the same east-west street.

¹²⁴ Viya, *México Ayer*, 183.

¹²⁵ Richard Joseph, "Mexico--Land of Contrasts," *Esquire*, March 1947, 159.

¹²⁶ Jiménez, *Sitios de rompe y rasga*, 91. The word *desveladero* comes from the verb *desvelar* and its participle *desvelado*, which signify "sleepless" or "being unable to sleep". Thus the noun *desveladero* means a "sleepless nightspot" where people can party all night long. *Peladito* was an insulting slang for someone of lower income,

The depot Jiménez mentioned was located just down Dr. Liceaga street in the Indianilla neighborhood and was a site for tram repair. Dotting the street were numerous dinner stands serving up chicken soup for the tram drivers at the end of their shifts—or for those arriving at dawn before other food was available—earning the area the nickname “*caldos de consome*”, as the heady smells of the soup (roast chicken, cilantro, and raw onion, among others) permeated the neighborhood. By the 1920s, Mexicans from diverse social and economic backgrounds and from every sector of the city would head to Indianilla for the *caldos* after attending a cabaret or party to sample the popular and tasty soup. La Leda and the soup stands formed a symbiosis, sharing customers and reinforcing each others’ appeal for both locals and people from elsewhere. Slumming by wealthier individuals in the neighborhood was common; “it was the most snob to top off an elegant theater viewing or a formal dinner” by going to La Leda, taking in the “atmosphere” and “throwing oneself into a mambo of democratic promiscuity with the people of dives and dumps.”¹²⁷ Notable celebrities visited, including the “painters Diego Rivera, Alfaro Siqueiros, Roberto Montenegro, Frida Kahlo, Aurora Reyes;” cinema figures like Julio Bracho, ‘El Indio’ Fernández, María Felix, Isabela Corona, Luis Buñuel, Chano Urueta; and photographers Lola y Manuel Álvarez Bravo.

Also well-known and frequented by the well-heeled and popular classes alike was the bar Los Eloines located in front of the Teatro Lírico at number 46, calle República de Cuba in the Centro. The establishment benefited from its location near several theaters nearby, and was popular with individuals involved with show-business. At the site, Daniel Mont, known as “El King Kong” and Los Eloines’ proprietor, “convened the high society gays who after the theater,

lacking taste (specifically that in the middle-class), and who speaks vulgarly. Related to the word *peladeces*, which are bad, or obscene words. I am grateful to writer Hector Antonio Sánchez for this definition.

¹²⁷ Viya, *México Ayer*, 183.

the opera, or the symphony, ate in chic sites and—frequently smoking—lowered themselves to hobnob with the *peladaje*”, i.e., persons of lower social strata.¹²⁸ As Viya recalled, at Los Eloines, a *niño bien*—or a wealthy young man—could feel that he was “knowing” the popular neighborhoods of the city, albeit being removed from those actual neighborhoods.¹²⁹

La Leda and Los Eloines like other working-class *de ambiente* bars served as important contact zones between the classes. This was due largely to their queer character, both in terms of their homosexual clientele and the interstitial, liminal spaces they offered between social worlds. A wealthier individual, such as the *niño bien* described by Viya, could be at the “threshold” of entering a popular neighborhood, thereby reveling in the possibilities that such a contact zone offered; likewise, someone of the popular classes could be at the threshold of the life higher statuses offered while engaging with those others who came to the clubs in search of “authentic” Mexicans like himself. Moreover, these liminal spaces destabilized—or marked as counterfeit—the structural barriers between sectors of Mexican society, whether official or unofficial. This by no means meant that interactions were utopian or egalitarian—indeed, what we know about the sites suggests they were more a fantasy space rather than a real, neighborhood bar like La Lucha—but it did not mean that interactions were necessarily exploitative from either direction.

At the back of La Leda “there was a very long bar that was precisely the site of indiscreet romantic flings and very direct flirtations that left no doubt about [patrons’] intentions;” there, sexual interactions were sought and consummated.¹³⁰ Sex and same-sex interactions that occurred in such sites—or that were initiated in them as part of the adventure-seeking of some patrons or the desire to step out of life’s harsher or more monotonous realities—were not

¹²⁸ Carlos Monsiváis, “Los gays en México: la fundación, la ampliación, la consolidación del gueto,” *Debate Feminista* 13, no. 26, Sexo y Violencia (October 2002): 102.

¹²⁹ Viya, *México Ayer*, 184.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

necessarily bounded by identity politics. That is, flirtations and flings that occurred in an interstitial bar like La Leda existed in an *ambiente* that “queered” normative boundaries; in such a site, as the old Mexican joke goes, the difference between a heterosexual and homosexual man could come down to the number of drinks one consumed.

Gay Bars?

La Leda and Los Eloines—like other bars *de ambiente*—were not unique in their neighborhoods; that is, they were not the sole sites of homosexual possibilities. Homosexuals were often visible along nearby streets and in establishments nearby. At least one bar near Lecumberri prison hosted homosexuals in 1948.¹³¹ Similarly, homosexuals frequented the taverns on Donceles Street and adjacent streets in the 1950s, as agents of the Servicio Secreto arrested more than thirty homosexuals in the night of June 14, 1953.¹³² These arrests occurred along the same street as the Teatro Fru Fru, itself known for its *ambiente*, and a street south of República de Cuba, where Los Eloines was located; a few blocks west, homosexuals cruised in the Alameda Park, and a few north, men sought each other out in the lubricated, mariachi-infused environment of El Tenampa on the Plaza Garibaldi.

Carlos Monsiváis has stated that one of the first—if not the first—“gay” bars in Mexico City was the Madreselva, located at the corner of Río Panuco and Nilo streets in Colonia Cuauhtemoc in 1949. The Madreselva was a “small cabaret where the *entendidos* drank but didn’t dance, craved but rarely ventured beyond the verbal, beyond what was permitted by the game of hands beneath the table and ‘eye sex.’”¹³³ Viya recalled that the “place belonged to an American couple and a reserved and elegant clientele collected there.” The bar was “painted

¹³¹ Fernández, “El descaro de los sodomitas,” 8.

¹³² “Hizo una redada de homosexuales la policía el sábado,” *El Nacional*, June 16, 1953, sec. 2, 4.

¹³³ Monsiváis, “Los gays en México,” 102.

totally in blue and only was illuminated with candle light which was everywhere,” meaning that it was “the ideal place for a furtive date and to give a good impression to the invited person.”¹³⁴

However, to claim that the Madreselva was the first gay bar is to narrowly define what constituted “gay” and to miss the rich *ambiente* that had already flourished, such as the sites I described above. If anything, the Madreselva’s reserved atmosphere paled in comparison to the vibrant climate of places like La Lucha or El Dragón de Oro. For some elites, but particularly the middle-class, the social consequences of being “burned” (*quemado*) by accusations of homosexuality led both to the double lives that some lived and to the creation of more discreet spaces that were less representative of the true nature of the *ambiente* at the time. If “gay” therefore depended on the site being exclusive for self-identifying homosexuals—a quality assumed to only exist among elites—then was Madreselva the first, let alone the best, example?

This is by no means a criticism of the bar itself, which no doubt served an important role in certain social sectors in the city. Other bars would do likewise, and throughout the 1950s, several more were in operation that had a wealthier clientele. These included the Yuma in 1952, a bar in Colonia Juárez along Genoa street and precursor to the famous Safari bar of later years. There was El Eco, located at 43 Sullivan street, that offered supper and two drinks for 50 pesos in 1958; it had an “enormous bar,” was open late with “hot music,” showcased art exhibitions, and was in Monsiváis’s terms, the “catwalk of the *entendidos*.”¹³⁵ As Miko Viya recalled, “El Eco had its day, and no person of the *ambiente* deprived himself of making an appearance, above all on Saturday night when the *ambiente* was at its peak.”¹³⁶ The Belvedere at 166 Reforma had a “lobby” and club (located on top of the Continental Hilton), both famous as sites where

¹³⁴ Viya, *México Ayer*, 184.

¹³⁵ John Wilhelm, *Guide to Mexico City*, 4th ed. (Mexico: Ediciones Tolteca, 1958), 39; Monsiváis, “Los gays en México,” 125. Guidebooks like those by Wilhelm did not comment on the bar’s queer *ambiente*, however.

¹³⁶ Viya, *México Ayer*, 184.

homosexuals met; dinner and two drinks there would set you back 120 pesos.¹³⁷ There you could see “sophisticated young people holding in an intricate balance a highball in one hand and a cigarette in the other, arching eyebrows and casting hungry and provocative looks or cold and contemptuous [ones] in an affected and shocking *blasé* air.”¹³⁸ It was in the Belvedere in which the concerned father who wrote authorities as part of the 1959 Casasola case allegedly observed the activities of the pimping ring that offered young Mexican men to American tourists in order to exploit the latter.¹³⁹ At the corner of Chapultepec and Florencia streets was L’Etui Café, where the helpful waiter Chucho served as a “newspaper” and message service for the community.¹⁴⁰ And in Colonia Condesa could be found the bar Luigi, where *locas* imitating Katina Ranieri, Valente, and Lola Beltrán gave shows; the same bar was a well-known site for lesbians.¹⁴¹

For those seeking a saltier time, there was Las Adelas on one side of the Plaza Garibaldi, “frequented by travesties, gays in search of adventure, tourists, and drunk heterosexuals.” Patrons could listen to ranchera music from the jukebox. Those that were still there at the close at 7 am would see the line of women with their bottles waiting for milk, as at that time the site began its double-life as a creamery.¹⁴² Also at the Plaza Garibaldi was El Tenampa, still offering a “whirlwind” of sexual options. Many fashionable parties held by wealthier homosexuals on Saturdays ended at El Tenampa. At the bar “there were those who hoped to find a relation, a chat, or something that would fill their Saturday solitude. To pick up someone.”¹⁴³ Finally, there was the Salón Paris at the corner of República de Cuba and Aquiles Serdán (today, Eje Central

¹³⁷ Wilhelm, *Guide to Mexico City*, 34, 38.

¹³⁸ Viya, *México Ayer*, 184-185.

¹³⁹ A father (name illegible), “Letter from Case File N/522/18110,” October 2, 1960, Departamento del Distrito Federal, Jefatura de Policía, Servicio Secreto, AHDF.

¹⁴⁰ Monsiváis, “Los gays en México,” 125. This site would still be popular in the 1960s.

¹⁴¹ Viya, *México Ayer*, 185.

¹⁴² Monsiváis, “Los gays en México,” 125.

¹⁴³ Viya, *México Ayer*, 186. The term used is *ligar*, i.e., to cruise and pick up.

Lázaro Cárdenas). Inside, there was a mixed crowd, with people casting flirtatious glances to each other in the mirror behind the Pofirian-era bar and having “strange encounters” with others in a “manly environment” that was both somewhat brutal and scented with danger. Such encounters ended in seedy hotel rooms nearby.¹⁴⁴

These are just some of the sites in which the *ambiente* could be found in the period, and they do not account for the socializing that occurred in exclusive parties held by the “second generation of gays,” according to Monsiváis, who emerged in the period.¹⁴⁵ Yet, as can be seen in the examples above, while there were numerous sites for wealthier homosexuals to congregate, those with the most excitement were the liminal spaces found in working-class areas. One’s persona, then, depended on the location, as sophistication might be called for or appreciated at El Eco or the Belvedere, but other more carnal interactions were the goal at the Plaza Garibaldi, a place where discretion melted in the heat of the moment.

Most of these spaces seem not to have appeared in official sources or press accounts of the period, at least in association to homosexuals. This may be due to patrons coming from different sectors—including foreign tourists with money to burn and non-homosexual elites—who helped shield the locations through their presence. Such locations, given the prices they charged, also had more income to throw around in bribes. Working-class bars, in contrast, were easier targets. Yet, many of these locations would close or change their clientele by the 1960s and beyond, creating a temporal gap in the *ambiente*’s archipelago. Later, when new specifically gay and lesbian establishments opened, many would not remember that these spaces had existed, and those that did held them up as the only sites of the *ambiente* at the time. This chapter has

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 185.

¹⁴⁵ Monsiváis, “Los gays en México,” 126-128.

sought to complicate and complement that vision, as well as to explain how this vibrant world, so important to explaining urban and national histories of the period, had faded from memory.

Conclusion

It is important to note that while bars, cabarets, and cantinas formed the most important sites of the *ambiente* during the golden age, other locations, which were also used by non-homosexual Mexicans, also served important roles. As mentioned before, the Alameda would remain a site for homosexual activity. So too would Chapultepec Park, although it could be a dangerous site due to the gangs that preyed upon homosexuals there.¹⁴⁶ Public baths also could serve as meeting grounds, which due to the availability of steam baths and massages, became the “refuge of *equivocados*.”¹⁴⁷ In other words, there remained multiple venues in which individuals could find the *ambiente*; some, like the parks, would survive the purges conducted during the 1940s and 1950s and remain sites of the *ambiente* later in the century.

I opened Section III with a description of a photograph taken of two patrons at El Dragón de Oro bar in 1947. It is possible that these men were the Marilu and La Mimosa described above, given the details that Paulino Ek provided. There’s was a vibrant *ambiente* that survived despite repeated attempts to dismantle it, but the golden age would draw to a close by the conclusion of the 1950s to be replaced by a more tumultuous period of activism and militancy in the 1960s and 1970s. Certainly, not all sites of homosexual interaction disappeared, and even after Uruchurtu’s raids, homosexual men would continue asserting their identities and rights. Nor could the *ambiente* be cleansed from its entrenched position in the Zona Rosa, a neighborhood that would become synonymous with the LGBTQ community later in the century. Yet, the

¹⁴⁶ Francisco Piña V., “Formaban tenebrosa banda cuyo centro de actividades estaba en Chapultepec,” *El Nacional*, December 20, 1949, sec. 2, 1.

¹⁴⁷ Manuel Pavon B., “Varias impresiones ciudadanas,” *Suplemento de Policía*, April 1, 1948, 16.

systematic attempts to destroy the *ambiente* during the 1940s and 1950s did result in the “golden age” being largely forgotten, even as it was a period of significant self-expression and homosexual community.

What is important to take from these examples is that working-class bars, rather than those in wealthier areas, were the most important sites in the *ambiente* insofar as they linked various groups together across lines of class, gender, and sexual orientation. They served as contact zones between the local, national, and transnational, condensing all three into the songs on the jukebox, the drinks served, the styles worn, and the conversations held. If these sites are also read as sites of resistance—to prevailing sex/gender norms, to the imposition (or attempt thereof) of virile citizenship, and to the overreaches of state power—then they are important precursors to the grassroots movements in the 1970s that also sought human, civil, and legal rights for homosexuals. Moreover, they show how businesses recognized and sought to cultivate the power of the “pink peso” by providing sites for homosexuals to gather, even as authorities launched moral campaign after moral campaign.

As the two extended case studies in this chapter showed, some homosexuals challenged the use of crimes like *ultrajes a la moral* and *corrupción de menores* that had been in effect since the decriminalization of sodomy in 1871, and they also were thinking about their place in the world in terms of their identity, its origins (such as from God), and what their futures would hold. The latter tempers the impulse to overstate the resistance of people in these sites, as being homosexual was still a challenge in the period. Nevertheless, these examples also provide clear examples of how working-class homosexuals did not live their lives totally in terror but had created their own social worlds and were even critical of those who came from other classes and tried to live “double” lives, rather than lives fully without masks.

Finally, this chapter has provided evidence of the overlapping spheres in which desire, belief, identity, and community intersected and converged during the period. Being homosexual did not disqualify religious belief, nor was it incompatible with the veneration of saints. Being wealthy did not disqualify one from seeking out the *ambiente* among individuals of another class, nor did less wealth mitigate interest in the *ambiente* from the popular classes. Homosexuals were thus not separate from larger social or cultural spheres but enmeshed within them, articulating their own world views, despite the significant pressures levied against them.

Conclusion

Nation, Transnational Identities, and Legacies of the Ambiente in the 1960s and 1970s

On January 25, 1958, a Mexican man named Antonio González wrote a letter to *ONE* magazine in Los Angeles. *ONE*, which began publishing in January 1953, was one of the most prominent homophile publications in the United States during the 1950s. González approved of the magazine's efforts: "For the past few months, I have been receiving your magazine: ONE, which I find very interesting. It's a pleasure for me to read your intersting [sic] articles and to keep up with what is going on in the U.S."¹ González lived with his family at 141 Coahuila street in Colonia Roma, a middle-class neighborhood located west of Mexico City's center. This caused him a problem: "I find it rather difficult to keep your magazine out of sight at all times," he wrote, especially when the magazine first arrived in the mail. Thus, González requested that the magazine be sent instead to his friend A. M. León Ortega who lived alone at the Plaza Miravalle (at the intersection of Durango and Oaxaca streets in Colonia Roma).

We might surmise from the letter that González was a younger man without financial independence, in contrast to León Ortega, who had more resources, given that he lived alone. Such resources allowed him to engage with transnational homosexual circuits, of which *ONE* was a participant, without the potential shame or threat to honor that González faced should the magazine be found. Nevertheless, the letter, written in excellent English (aside from a few typographical errors), demonstrated González's high education level, and his interest in keeping-up with what occurred in the United States showed that he was someone for whom homosexuality had a transnational dimension. That is, the articles in *ONE* describing homosexual lives and the efforts that US American homosexuals made to secure their rights resonated with

¹ "Antonio González to ONE," January 25, 1958, ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, Digital Files.

him, and at least for some months, he was willing to risk having the publication delivered to his home. In this, he was not alone; in December 1954, the magazine reported that there were two subscribers in Mexico.²

González was the sort of homosexual that the authors of *Sodoma pide fuero* and critics since the turn-of-the-century had warned about: he was influenced by a US American organization dedicated to promoting the homosexual cause. He could not be, therefore, a dedicated patriot or a true virile citizen. He was a proselyte of nefarious vice, akin to the dandies who had served in the Porfirian government and the *afeminados* exiled to the Islas Mariás. But he was also something else, something that homophobic pundits had not yet realized: a harbinger of the coming social movements that loomed just over the horizon in the 1960s and 1970s, of which homosexual liberation was an integral part. The victories that the state won in 1959 ultimately were hollow, as they alienated sectors of society away from unity with the state's version of *lo mexicano* and marginalized individuals and groups who might have been ardent nationalists and cultural producers in their own right. At the apex of xenophobia and homophobia, the seeds for the forty-year process of dismantling the PRI's hold on Mexican government and recapitulating citizenship as something "universal" rather than "exclusive" had been planted. In a short time, they would sprout, and as before, gender and sexuality would remain at the center, as male students who challenged authority were described in the same ways that homosexuals had been in previous decades, as sexual liberation swept through Mexico as the renewal of the erotic revolution, as sex became a more generalized way of expressing political

² "How Many Subscribers?," *ONE*, December 1954, 28. There were also apparently two subscribers in Honduras and one in Colombia as well. Given the number of foreigners living in Mexico at the time, it is necessary to be cautious in making a claim that the two subscribers were Mexican, but González's letter breaks the assumption that Mexicans could *not* be those who were subscribing. Beyond the letter, I have found few other direct links between Mexican homosexuals and the homophile movement in the United States, but that may be as much a product of the constraints imposed by dissertation research as it is an "absence" of materials. My suspicion is that other similar letters exist, but the research at ONE and other archives will wait for my future book.

dissidence, and as homosexuals came to take important roles in student activism and grassroots movements seeking the actual fulfillment of Mexico's revolutionary promise, not the limited vision to which the state subscribed.

"Homosexual" Identity

The moralization campaigns that punctuated Uruchurtu's tenure as regent of Mexico City would continue into the 1960s. *El Nacional* reported on a number of high-profile events in the 1960s, and publications like *Alarma*, *Alerta*, *El Universal Gráfico*, and *Avance* would routinely publish pieces on sexual deviance. However, moods and political sensibilities were shifting in Mexico. As the authoritarian regime—and its proxy in the capital—grew more draconian in its efforts to contain political dissidence, possibilities began opening for alliances that had previously not existed: between homosexuals as a defined political minority and other groups seeking reforms in Mexican society. These would mature in the crucible of the 1960s and burst forth after the Tlatelolco massacre in 1968 as a series of grassroots efforts aimed at securing a different future for Mexico than the one the PRI advocated.

At the same time, the once wide-spread archipelago that had comprised the *ambiente* had taken a serious blow. The Casasola case had served as the final justification for significant repression, and the Mexican government had the resources to effect changes it had only dreamed about in previous decades. However, the *ambiente* was already flourishing in a new part of the capital—the Zona Rosa. Founded in the 1950s in Colonia Juárez west of the Centro as a business zone, the area had long been a transnational contact zone. By mid-century, it became a premier tourist destination and hangout for bohemians, artists, writers, thinkers, millionaires and poor vagabonds who were part of the *nouvelle vague* (new wave) of culture, known in Mexico as *la*

onda, that was crashing against the cracking edifice of the institutionalized revolution. The Zona Rosa was modernity incarnate. As *Sucesos para Todos* in 1967 reported, there, at night, began

...the bustle of thousands of luxuriously or outlandishly dressed people: the cafés and the cantinas or *cabarets* fill with eager patrons of diversion. Beautiful women, men with manes and vagabond beards, chats in foreign languages or in the *argot* of *gente bien*, screeching brakes in the streets, loudspeakers with strange sounds; in sum, an environment of a parochial fair but with *snobs* as protagonists.”³

The article, however, was not simply a feature piece on the Zona Rosa’s *mélange* of modernity. It was instead an interview with a teenage homosexual youth named Mario, a citizen of the area who mingled with the hodgepodge of people in the capital’s newest and most concentrated contact zone. Mario sat with his friends—also homosexual—and described his life. Police had detained him and his friends on more than one occasion “for being homosexuals.” As he described, “Almost every night they come and when they catch us they threaten to put us in jail for a *quincena* (fortnight). We have to give them at least one-hundred pesos so that they release us.” Police would charge Mario and his friends for making scandals in public, or demanded that they pay for gas by giving up their money or a watch. If an effeminate homosexual would stare too long at a handsome cop, he would charge him for the view. Even worse, the police would force youths to point out other homosexuals, and “we will point out others who aren’t because we fear them because they beat us for being homosexual, and it’s not our fault for being so.”⁴

However, Mario and his friends girded themselves against these assaults by being voracious readers “so that no one makes us appear foolish.” “We read books about homosexuality to defend ourselves against the accusations that they make against us,” he continued. For the first time during the 1960s, Mario, his young friends, and other homosexuals

³ “Zona Rosa,” *Sucesos Para Todos*, March 18, 1967.

⁴ Mario had faced the Tribunal de Menores as well, and his story is the only one of which I am aware told from the youth’s own perspective. Although he had committed no offense, he was treated initially poorly and beaten by another boy there. However, later two social workers advocated for his release, and the judge of his case promised him a job working in Televisión.

had more sympathetic books on homosexuality to read that were produced in Mexico. These included Paolo Po's *41, o el muchacho que soñaba en fantasmas*, published in 1963 and possibly the country's first "gay" novel.⁵ Its appeal to him is not surprising: according to the editorial note, it was written by a young Mexican writer who preferred to remain hidden by his pseudonym, and the book is an archive of the Mexican *ambiente*, the lives of people who lived in it, the sites that were becoming popular at the time for their *ambiente* (such as the Sanborns restaurant near the Zona Rosa), and their orbits within transnational flows that included physique culture, references to famous foreign poets like Walt Whitman, and mentions of "gay ghettos" in other locations, such as Greenwich Village. More importantly, the text asserted that being homosexual was distinct from being a *maricón*, which resonated with Mario as he disliked being mocked. As the narrator in *41* described,

There is not a cleaner man in the world than the man who knows himself and how he is. And I know myself, fully, to the full extent of what I am....A homosexual—which is not the same as a *maricón*—that has accepted himself.⁶

The book, then, was a call to action; part of the "defense" that Mario and his friends could levy was that they were not *maricones*, not representatives of a "type" that could be derided, but instead self-aware homosexuals. From such a vantage point, they would have moral superiority—being "clean"—over those that assailed them.

What is remarkable about Mario's statement and his interest in the message of Po's book is that it came eleven years before the official start of the Mexican homosexual liberation movement. While there were stirrings early in the 1970s, it was in 1978 that homosexual organizations took to the street to demand their rights. Moreover, Mario's assertion of self-

⁵ Paolo Po, *41, o el muchacho que soñaba en fantasmas (casi una novela)* (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Costa-Amic, 1963). Another book was Roger Peyrefitte's *Las amistades particulares*, originally published in 1956 in Buenos Aires but in circulation in Mexico. Again, the transnational imagining of homosexual identity is apparent in Mario's interest in this book.

⁶ Ibid., 215.

awareness and the need for education to defend himself came two years before the Stonewall Riots in New York, the benchmark event to which has been attributed the radicalization of gays and lesbians the world over.⁷ But Mario had his own identity and self-awareness before then, and they were in part based on his own experiences and a locally-produced novel. And, I would hazard, the development of homosexual identities and communities in the previous decades.

For Mario, the Zona Rosa was an exciting place dominated by the *ambiente*. There his friends would meet and spend time together meandering its streets, speaking of “things we like sexually, chatting, and admiring the people that pass by.” It was a place where they could be themselves, go to parties, and participate in the “market” for a lover, even as they still faced moments of ridicule and police repression. Nearly a decade after González sent his letter to *ONE*, Mario expressed the sort of identity that would characterize much of the homosexual liberation movement and put a claim on the term *homosexual* as an identity without stigma. Between the letter and article, the militant homosexual had already been born, and while he would not fully emerge in politics for a few more years, he was already part of a larger community that had survived attempts to destroy it and concentrated itself in an officially-created contact zone. Indeed, by dismantling the *ambiente* as an archipelago, authorities helped create the conditions for a neighborhood more fully in the orbit of homosexuals. And since this neighborhood served as a prominent attraction in the city, it meant that Mexico was on display, thereby mitigating to an certain extent the amount of power that could be exercised. This did not mean that repression ended, but it did mean that the conditions favorable to creating more formal “gay” barrio existed and that homosexuals would be enshrined in Mexico’s self-presentation to the world.

⁷ The Stonewall Riots, which occurred in the early morning of June 28, 1969, were marked by a violent response from homosexuals, many of them racial minorities, against a police raid on the Stonewall Inn. Often cited as the catalyst for the gay rights movement in the United States and elsewhere, it is also one of the first times that homosexuals openly fought back against state-sponsored persecution.

During the 1960s, other books would appear that also discussed homosexuality. There was Miguel Barbachano Ponce's *El diario de José Toledo* (1964), which also introduced a variety of homosexual characters and described the *ambiente*'s wide reach in the 1950s.⁸ There was also Vincente Leñero's *Los albañiles* (1964) that "located homosexuality among Mexico's most macho of working-class men, construction workers."⁹ This was yet another salvo against the imagined *pelado* as the true representative of virile, heteronormative citizenship. Thus, while the 1940s and 1950s had seen a flourishing of homophobic texts by criminologists, texts like Camacho's treatise on sex reassignment, and the vitriolic *Sodoma pide fuero*, it was the 1960s, in which there was the birth of a new opening to homosexuality in literature. And with it came the new identities that youths like Mario and his friends expressed.

After 1959

This dissertation concludes at a liminal moment following the repressive end of the *ambiente*'s golden age. It is a natural stopping point because what follows is a turn towards militant politics—enabled by identities like Mario's—and the beginning of a new era for the *ambiente*. This dissertation also closes at the apex of state attempts to control the homosexual minority as part of the national development project. By the 1950s, even Salvador Novo had converted from a serious critic of virile masculinity into an ardent promoter of Mexican culture and society, a path he embraced due to his connections with the Mexican government; this came at the expense of his public indiscretions, even as it remained an open "secret" that he was homosexual. He was, in essence, representative of the success that the PRI had in co-opting ideologically diverse

⁸ Miguel Barbachano Ponce, *El diario de José Toledo* (Mexico, D.F.: Libreria Madero, 1964). For an English translation, see Miguel Barbachano Ponce, *The Diary of José Toledo: A Translation and Critical Edition*, trans. Clary Loisel (New Orleans: University Press of the South, 2001).

⁹ Robert McKee Irwin, *Mexican Masculinities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 229. See Vincente Leñero, *Los albañiles* (Barcelona: Editorial Seix Barral, S.A., 1964).

sectors into supporting their one-party regime. But this “alliance” would ultimately fail because younger homosexuals like Mario would radicalize and not accept the bifurcation of their lives—between the sexual and the public—as prerequisites for some second-class status.

What happened after 1959? Certainly, the Casasola raids were not the end of police action against homosexuals, nor the ridicule of homosexuals in the press. There are spectacular examples of roundups in the 1960s and 1970s although not of the same scale as that of Fall 1959. But a growing backlash against police corruption—known and criticized for decades—would begin to reconsider who was labeled as victim and who as criminal, particularly as the police were involved with the authoritarian excesses of the PRI regime. By the early 1970s, more social actors—from periodicals in the public sphere to authors of child-rearing manuals—were questioning the insistence that homosexuality was a crime, perversion, or illness that threatened the nation’s social fabric. This was because other sectors had been similarly brutalized by the regime in the violent reactions to the Mexican student movement in 1968 and 1971 (as well as earlier). Marginalization beget the possibility for new forms of political and ideological alliances. Once it was no longer a foregone conclusion that homosexuals were the nation’s others, diverse sectors began asking what they had done that warranted their exclusion. These would include feminists, women’s organizations, workers’ unions, the Mexican Left (which struggled to overcome its past criticism of homosexuals as anti-revolutionaries), students, sectors of the middle-class intelligentsia, artists, writers, and more. Alliances would come and go between these groups, and homophobia would remain a potent force in the public sphere. But it would not enjoy this status without being challenged by sectors beyond the *ambiente* itself.

I would argue that this process had been underway since at least the 1930s among a few actors in the public sphere. Despite the sensationalism printed about homosexuals, there were

those who were openly sympathetic—like Judith Martínez Ortega—and those whose work presented a more complicated vision of homosexuality, from the journalism of Miguel Gil and Paulino Ek to the multiple treatises on prison sexuality and the photographs taken by Casasola and Díaz. These were not necessarily pro-homosexual texts, but they did inject complexities into debates on homosexuality by fleshing out the homosexual as more than an unequivocal foil for national ideologies, a degraded being, or a vicious criminal. They, while still condemning homosexuality, helped to humanize homosexuals.

Sucesos para Todos would pick up on this role following its piece on Mario. As one of Mexico's most-read and premier weeklies, it carried weight in the public sphere. In the early 1970s, it began a regular sex column that fielded questions from all kinds of Mexicans, including homosexuals. In one response to a homosexual searching for someone to love in an August 1972 column entitled "Homosexuales hermanos nuestros," (Our Homosexual Brothers), it cited British-Canadian writer and gay activist Peter Wildeblood's *Against the Law* (originally published in 1955): "I seek only to apply to my life the rules which govern the lives of all good men; freedom to choose a partner and...to live with him discreetly and faithfully."¹⁰ Such words no doubt resonated with the letter-writer and other homosexuals, and they demonstrated the magazine's knowledge of homosexuality in a transnational context. The magazine would continue the column and other articles on sexuality for a few more years, and it helped expand the opening in the public sphere so that sympathy—and even solidarity—could be more fully expressed towards homosexuals.

Myths of Homosexuality in Mexico

¹⁰ B. G., "Auxilio sexual: Homosexuales hermanos nuestros," *Sucesos Para Todos*, August 4, 1972, 43. See Peter Wildeblood, *Against the Law* (New York: J. Messner, 1959).

As this narrative conclusion and the chapters that preceded it show, homosexuality was significantly important in the debates on Mexican nation and identity, and the experiences of homosexuals would factor into ongoing changes occurring in the realms of politics and culture as Mexico developed and modernized. In this way, my work illuminates the way that certain “myths” about homosexuality—not the least of which that it was insignificant in Mexican history—have obfuscated the true complexity of homosexuality in Mexican history and the *necessity* of studying it to fully understand processes of nation-building, citizenship, and the development of cultural understandings of gender. Through this project, I have thus rendered the queer lives that individuals lived before the onset of militant activism in the late 1960s in greater relief and acknowledged them as more than a mere prelude to “real” gay identities.

In illuminating these myths, I have been influenced by George Chauncey’s groundbreaking work *Gay New York* in which he defined and challenged three myths about the “history of gay life before the rise of the gay liberation movement.” These myths—of *isolation*, *invisibility*, and *internalization*—obscured the vibrant histories of gay men in New York decades before Stonewall.¹¹ Similar myths have operated in studies of Mexico (and even in works by activists in the late twentieth century), and they—reinforced in academic frameworks that privileged American and European homosexual liberation—have contributed to the obfuscation of the rich, complex, and nuanced sorts of histories described above. In Mexico, at least three more myths also operated: the *myth of strict gender stratification*—as understood through the active/passive binary; the *myth of backwardness*—i.e., that Mexico developed queer identities

¹¹ Chauncey offered a model in which forgotten histories could be restored, cartographies of identity and homosexual desire could be mapped, the boundaries between “heterosexual” and “homosexual” more fully understood, and Whiggish teleologies of progress—i.e., that LGBT progressed in a linear fashion throughout the twentieth century from near total repression to liberation—could be complicated.

after and *because* of the west, rather than concurrently; and the *myth of disconnectedness*—i.e., that Mexico’s queer community was too small to either matter on a local or national scale.

First, the *myth of isolation*, which in Chauncey’s words holds that “anti-gay hostility prevented the development of an extensive gay subculture and forced gay men to lead solitary lives in the decades before the rise of the gay liberation movement.”¹² In Mexico, the received view has long been that that after the Famous 41 scandal, most men in the *ambiente* faced only repression and terror, living their lives between furtive sexual couplings and lacking the social development to know who or what they were. As Carlos Monsiváis wrote, “From the early morning of November 17, 1901 to 1978”—the public emergence of homosexual liberation—“gays lived seized by panic from the Redada,” that is, by the state-sanctioned attempts to excise them from society. For Monsiváis, only when the term “gay” had been popularized was this process interrupted.¹³ Only a few were able to “come out,” and the remainder of *afeminados* lived relatively isolated from each other.

Although authors like Monsiváis have also described aspects of the social world in which homosexual men lived, they did not reveal the full extent or complexity of that world. Among each social class and across class lines, queer men hosted parties, established bars and social

¹² George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 2.

¹³ Carlos Monsiváis, “The 41 and the Gran Redada,” in *The Famous 41: Sexuality and Social Control in Mexico, 1901*, ed. Robert McKee Irwin, Edward J. McCaughan, and Michelle Rocio Nasser (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 165. Clark Taylor and David Lennox, both pioneers in studying Mexican homosexuality, advanced similar positions, insofar as they described the challenges that homosexuals faced, even in the 1970s. See Clark Taylor, “El Ambiente: Male Homosexual Social Life in Mexico City” (Dissertation, University of California, Berkley, 1978); David R Lennox, “Homosexuality in Mexico: Repression or Liberation?” (Dissertation, Tulane, 1976). Some activists, from the Movimiento de Liberación Homosexual until the present, have asserted that prior to the emergence of the formal movement in 1978, Mexican homosexuals largely lacked the social development to have identities based on sexuality. Taylor cites one who when asked if there was a “homosexual consciousness” in Mexico, replied, “No, it is too early for that. Perhaps in twenty, or forty years.” See Taylor, “El Ambiente,” 32. Sociologist Rafael de la Dehesa’s important comparative study of queer rights and politics in Mexico and Brazil also mirrors Monsiváis’s periodization through its focus on the late twentieth century and its limited treatment of historical examples. See Rafael De la Dehesa, *Queering the Public Sphere in Mexico and Brazil: Sexual Rights Movements in Emerging Democracies* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010).

venues, and organized both communities and new forms of kinship in private homes from at least the turn-of-the-century. These men also colonized public spaces such as the Alameda Central for their own purposes, platonic or sexual. They developed visual codes, glances, and languages that alerted them to the existence of others like them and organized sex-rings and dating services. Some homosexuals were even publicly well known, and, ironically, worked for institutions like the judicial system that put others like them in prison. Isolated, then, these men were not, even as they most definitely faced significant threats from the police who arrested them, from “normal men” who abused/murdered them, and from criminals who exploited them, as well as critics in politics, the press, and cultural spheres who sought to denounce them as anti-Mexican.

Indeed, the men were not *invisible* to each other or to the society at large. The *ambiente* that existed in Mexico City and other urban centers did not exist in shadowed corners—although there were plenty of clandestine spaces for sex or interaction—but instead could be found rather openly in bars, along fashionable streets, in working-class neighborhoods, at universities, gyms, parks, swimming pools, and more. *Afeminados* announced their presence to the world through their mannerisms, their styles of dress, specific colors (like red and green) and hairstyles. They also mingled with other Mexicans in bohemian dives and high-class clubs. While tabloids like *Alarma!* would criticize them regularly as “unhappy”, many photographs throughout the period show homosexuals enjoying life. These images were published in widely read magazines, and the role of the mainstream media in circulating knowledge on the *ambiente*, where it could be found, and who populated it was significant because through such reporting, even if it were negative, the press actually increased the visibility of homosexuals.¹⁴

¹⁴ While in Mexico, activist/historian Miguel Hernández affirmed my own thinking that sources considered homophobic—such as a conservative paper or trashy tabloid—actually were some of the best archives of material, however biased, on the queer communities in Mexico and homosexuality itself.

How did these men feel about themselves? The *myth of internalization* holds that even if this community existed and was visible, homosexuals nevertheless internalized uncritically the dominant culture's views that homosexuality was a sickness, a criminal disorder, deviant, and/or immoral. Because they adopted these tropes, they were complicit in hegemonic homophobia, asserting their own respectability and honor vis-à-vis other homosexuals, wealthy or poor.

Certainly, there was no single homosexual community and no single take on what it meant to be *de ambiente* in Mexican society, and men defined themselves against both “normal” or “real” men as well as each other. Some men did internalize aspects of homophobia, declaring that they would only sleep with such “real” men. But we should not over-emphasize these divisions to signify that homosexuals did not resist their standing in society. The very act of cross-dressing in public was a political maneuver, particularly after 1901, and *afeminados* as early as 1912 filed legal challenges based on the decriminalization of sodomy—which they took to mean being homosexual—after 1871. They also began to assert their “normalcy” against discourses of criminality, immorality, and illness to the extent that they earned advocates among the general populace, from sympathetic prison officials to medical professionals questioning the “treatments” used for sexuality.

Related to the *myth of internalization* is the *myth of strict gender stratification*, which depends on both the male/female honor/shame paradigm, whose classic formation was advanced by Julian Pitt-Rivers, and the *hijos de la chingada* mythology offered by Octavio Paz, which harkens back to the initial conquest of Mexico and the role that Malinche (*la chingada*) played.¹⁵ These two perspectives reinforce each other in the (in)famous “active/passive binary”,

¹⁵ Pitt-Rivers argued that penetration was the key arbiter of honor for women and men; women needed to be virgins until marriage, while men needed to protect themselves from penetration. See Julian Pitt-Rivers, *The Fate of Shechem, or the Politics of Sex: Essays in the Anthropology of the Mediterranean* (London: Cambridge University

which attributed preeminent societal status to heterosexual men, while women and queer men were “passive” recipients upon which men’s power and physical desires were expressed. In this binary, “active” men, regardless of who they penetrated, could claim honorable status, or at the very least, an indulgence for their behavior. This binary has cast a long, unfortunate shadow over gender and sexuality studies of Latin America in general and of Mexican sexualities in particular, forming the basic frame for much research. Indeed, this view became accepted, at least in part, in the social science and cultural studies models that have dominated discussions of Mexican sexuality for six decades, because it was deemed an accurate representation of “authentic” Mexican sex/gender norms.¹⁶ Such a flattening of colonial traumas into twentieth-century sex/gender systems is a significant overreach that is not supported by historical data because it assumes too neat of a correlation between such binary paradigms and homosexual interactions.¹⁷ Moreover, it expresses the idea that the experiences of only a narrow segment of men—the *travesti* (pre- or post-operative) and cross-dressing *afeminados*—were representative of *all* queer male experiences, for all types, across centuries of history.

Press, 1977). For Paz, see especially “Mexican Masks” and “The Sons of Malinche” in Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico*, trans. Lysander Kemp (New York: Grove Press, 1961). Mexican men are the “sons of the whore” (Malinche) because she forsook her own people (the Native Americans) to the Spanish, resulting in her being the “violated mother” of mestizos; in Paz’s formulation, then, offering oneself “passively” in sexual intercourse was akin to defeat, with the sexually active partner as the victor. Extended to homosexuality, passive partners are thus denounced, while active partners are “tolerated” because they penetrate passive others. Trexler strenuously argues that neither honor nor pleasure could be attained through anal penetration for the so-called “passive” partner, a claim that reduces sexuality to only expressions of power and seems dubious at best. See Richard C Trexler, *Sex and Conquest: Gendered Violence, Political Order, and the European Conquest of the Americas* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995). Debates between Trexler and Michael Horswell have degenerated in even scholarly conversations to rather personal recrimination. See the articles in Pete Sigal, ed., *Infamous Desire: Male Homosexuality in Colonial Latin America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

¹⁶ See for example the discussion of the binary as “gender stratification” in Stephen O. Murray, *Latin American Male Homosexualities* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).

¹⁷ This flattening and overreach seems particularly pronounced in anthropological studies advocating a “Mediterranean” model of sexuality as the basis of sexual interactions in Latin America; such studies assume the realities expressed largely to foreign participant observers in working-class neighborhoods in the contemporary period reflect inherent norms that can be traced back without interruption for centuries. Examples include Joseph Carrier, *De los Otros: Intimacy and Homosexuality Among Mexican Men* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); Taylor, “El Ambiente.”

Even though heteropatriarchal privilege has existed and continues to exist, the binary theory itself is historically untenable because sex/gender realities have been continually negotiated, challenged, torn apart and reconstituted. “Real men”, long assumed to have benefited from their status regardless of whom they had sex with, in fact suffered the same loss of prestige and rights as did queer men when caught in homosexual behaviors; while queer men were certainly punished as “traitors” to their own sex, “real men” at times even fared worse due to the belief they had abused their power over “weaker” individuals. Both “active” and “passive” pederasts were examined for “signs” of homosexual behavior, and such signs were used to convict them or as part of evidence showing their criminality. This means that the active/passive binary, while speaking to inequalities of Mexican sex/gender norms, cannot fully explain the men’s experiences nor fully illuminate how discourses of sexuality influenced society.¹⁸ Thus, one of my project’s most significant contributions is the excavation of working-class queer social spaces, identities, and communities that were far more complex than allowed for in the binary.

Moreover, I challenge the assertions that gender-stratified relationships (as well as age-stratified relationships) were the norm in working-class areas to the extent that they precluded an *ambiente* that incorporated forms of equality. A myriad of possible gender identities, sexual role preferences, and relationship types existed that call into question how solid the binary really was. Thus while at first glance relationships between men may have been viewed or represented by men as adhering to the dominant sex/gender system—or more precisely, to how that system was thought or portrayed to be—these relationships also occurred within an alternative sexual order that existed in the *ambiente*. This order overlapped with the dominant system, while also

¹⁸ Martin Nesvig was an early historian to question the veracity of the active/passive, honor/shame paradigm for homosexuality, stating that the historical record did not support either Paz’s or Trexlers assertions. See Martin Nesvig, “The Lure of the Perverse: Moral Negotiation of Pederasty in Porfirian Mexico,” *Mexican Studies / Estudios Mexicanos* 16, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 1-37.

contesting it and not being limited to it. Thus, the pervasiveness of the active/passive binary says as much about stereotypes of homosexual behavior as it does about the attempts to create, define, and codify “authentic” Mexican *heterosexuality*; that is, the binary was part of the medicalization and redefining of sexuality that had been ongoing since the last part of the nineteenth century in which new views of gender and sexuality were overlaid upon those believed to be “traditional” or authentic, then asserted to be iconic and inherent.¹⁹ The impenetrable *pelado* was one such type: a character claimed as “authentic” who carried meanings attributed to “traditions” reaching into the colonial past that were instead part of contemporary cultural and political agendas.

The active/passive binary also plays into *the myth of backwardness*, i.e., the notion that Mexico was behind the “West” in developing the *ambiente*, much like it was in modernizing. Such “backwardness” was due to inherent differences in Mexican “culture.” Yet, sociologist Lionel Cantú passionately argued that the problem was not cultural differences, but instead, the manner in which Mexican sexualities were studied. While studies of Western cities and societies have linked the social construction of Western gay identities with capitalist development, studies of the “developing world” had instead “given[n] primacy to culture and divorce[d] it from political economy.”²⁰ Indeed, many of the ground-breaking studies of Mexican (homo)sexualities have been conducted by anthropologists and social scientists following, at least in part, the cultural model and arguing in favor of the “otherness” of Mexican sex/gender norms, including the primacy of the active/passive binary or “Mediterranean” model of sexuality (which also privileged the active male vis-à-vis a more effeminate other) that was found in Latin America, as

¹⁹ The “invention” of heterosexuality was a major theme in Jonathan Ned Katz work, and it went hand in hand with the definition of the homosexual other. According to Katz, what we understand as heterosexuality really wasn’t clearly defined until around World War II. See Jonathan Ned Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality*. Reprint. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

²⁰ Lionel Cantú, “De Ambiente : Queer Tourism and the Shifting Boundaries of Mexican Male Sexualities,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 8, no. 1 (2002): 139-166.

well as Spain and Italy who were not part of the core “West” of Northwest Europe and the United States. Yet, as Cantú argued, “Should not Mexican sexual identities also be understood as multiply constituted and intimately linked to the structural and ideological dimensions of modernization and development?”²¹ In other words, along the same models used to investigate Western sexualities, rather than along the anthropological/cultural model of the active/passive, gender-stratified, “Mediterranean” model of Latin American sexuality. While Mexican development was distinct, its processes of modernization nevertheless resulted in the conditions that allowed for a similar emergence of identities, communities, and spaces in cities that occurred elsewhere.²² This was in large part because Mexican leaders, while espousing nationalist rhetoric, actually aspired to universal ideologies of modernity that involved practices of industrialization, urbanization, and identity formation akin to those in the West.

The risk, though, in asserting that Mexico was not distinct in terms of developing queer cultures in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is that specialists who focus on other areas of the world, particularly the Euro-American West, may respond to the Mexican case with an attitude of “this has been done before”. If the same myths that Chauncey articulated—and which other scholars have shown as relevant in other places—are true for Mexico, then the histories of the Mexican *ambiente* contained here are footnotes, however interesting, to the experience of queer communities in the United States or Europe. This is because a received view has been that the events in the West—such as the development of sexual criminology, the emergence of queer identities, and the development of homosexual liberation (as benchmarked by Stonewall)—have always preceded those elsewhere. A more nuanced reading of the same

²¹ Ibid., 3-4.

²² Here is a non-exhaustive list of neighborhoods in which there was pronounced *ambiente* by the 1920s: Centro, Obrero, Doctores, Roma, Guerrero, Morales, Condesa, Juárez, and Cuauhtémoc

perspective has been that even though the West may have been centers of both homosexual liberation, homophobia, and the discourses disseminated on both that influenced other areas of the world, local specificities outside of the West nevertheless matter. Yet even in this view, the West remains central, the ultimate metropole around which all else is periphery.

While many important events did occur first in American and European cities, several others occurred at the same time in other nations through a process I have termed *concurrent evolution*, a process in which similar identities, communities, and behaviors developed in many world cities simultaneously, even if all are understood to respond to local realities, due to modernization and urbanization that characterized global economic and social development during the later decades of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. James Green has demonstrated the presence of a vibrant homosexual community in Brazil at the same time as the one Chauncey described existed in New York.²³ Similarly, Pablo Ben has shown that concerns over homosexuality and masculinity were endemic in Argentina at the same moment that Oscar Wilde was facing trial and prison in the UK.²⁴ These communities, practices, and identities, did not appear *after* news of the emergence of homosexuals and sexual “deviants” arrived from other nations; in fact, as Zeb Tortorici has shown, centuries before, communities of sodomites had existed in Mexico.²⁵ It is thus necessary to question how much of the development of modern queer communities and identities relied on exterior influences as opposed to being based on local realities and similar responses to homophobic repression that became increasingly streamlined on a transnational scale.

²³ James N. Green, *Beyond Carnival: Male Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

²⁴ Pablo Ben, “Male Sexuality, the Popular Classes, and the State: Buenos Aires, 1880-1955” (Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2009).

²⁵ Zeb Tortorici, “‘Heran Todos Putos’: Sodomitical Subcultures and Disordered Desire in Early Colonial Mexico,” *Ethnohistory* 54, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 35-67.

What makes Mexico unique is while homosexuality was important to the state in other countries—most notably in the institutionalized homophobia rampant in the United States and in the ways in which Cuban identity was defined in part against homosexuality—in Mexico, homosexuality served as a significant carrier and driver of meaning across class, gender, political, social, and cultural lines at a time of national consolidation.²⁶ It became integral not only as a foil for Mexican virile citizenship, but also as a carrier and driver of meaning in the tensions surrounding sovereignty and identity. And in the convergences and contact zones between nationalism, aspirations for cosmopolitanism, local politics and cultures, and transnational flows of people and ideas, homosexuality and homosexuals found space to survive and, even more, to flourish. This was due to the reality that no unitary vision of homosexuality or masculine citizenship ever fully coalesced—even in the most homophobic of times—nor did the state or its agents achieve the full capability to effect the complete marginalization or excision of homosexuals from Mexican society, even if some of them desired to do so.

Attempts at repression actually helped coalesce the homosexual community as a oppositional force that publicly flouted, and this created a mutually reinforcing cycle of homosexual “panics” and homosexual community/identity consolidation starting in 1901 because Mexican identity and Mexican institutions, framed through ideas of virility, were so fragile. The final myth, that of *disconnectedness*, is thus fraudulent. Mexican homosexuality was integral to the nation, and it was enmeshed within transnational circuits of travel, meaning, and consumption. Indeed, while not directly a subject of this dissertation, a more interesting question to pose is how Mexico’s *ambiente*, in which so many foreigners who were homosexual or queer

²⁶ On the United States, see Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). On Cuba, see Emilio Bejel, *Gay Cuban Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Ian Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones, and Gays: Cuba and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1996).

“found” themselves, was in part responsible for or influential in the burgeoning queer cultures found in the West.

Final Thoughts

I have argued in this dissertation that homosexuality—as a discourse, as an experience, and even as a type of person—was crucial for defining Mexican nationhood, citizenship, and identity in the twentieth century. This history has largely been unexplored (or even ignored) until this project. Yet, with the prism of homosexuality, we can better see how nationalist aspirations and transnational influences converged around the ideal of the virile citizen, how *afeminados* and other homosexuals resisted this ideal and even appropriated masculinity for themselves, and how the most “modern” of Mexicans were often those deemed most unfit to be part of the body politic. Understanding twentieth-century Mexican history *requires* this prism of homosexuality, and my dual approach demonstrates how to enmesh social histories of the *ambiente* within and in relation to cultural histories of citizenship and the nation. The few anecdotes described above show the fruits of the ongoing contestation of identity, masculinity, and sexuality that marked debates in the public sphere, in state institutions designed to “reform” the homosexual other, and in the *ambiente* itself. They also show yet another version of *concurrent evolution*, of the development of identities in concert with, rather than in response to, transnational processes.

I have also demonstrated how understanding Mexican nationalism requires us to situate it within a transnational context, and how investigating homosexuality illuminates the contradictions in this process, the dual aspirations towards something autochthonous or “authentically” Mexican and something “universal” through which the state’s opponents could be dismissed on the grounds of being abnormal. Over time, homosexuals would learn to harness their marginal status—and their special role as foils that defined the nation through negation—to

demand their rights. The results would be the emergence of “sexual politics”—enshrined in a magazine of the same name in the late 1970s—and, perhaps more importantly, the *ambiente*’s commercial expansion, which tied to transnational circuits of consumption, tourism, and human rights, helped amplify the opening that occurred after 1959. That is the story of my next project.

We need these histories of homosexuality to better understand the post-revolutionary process, the significance of the “new man,” the successes and failures of revolutionary aspirations, and the rise and fall of the “institutionalized revolution” of the PRI. We need them because they redress a heteronormative bias that can occlude the complex ways citizenship was defined and experienced in twentieth-century Mexico, and because they complicate our understanding of the working-class, long deemed the “authentic” Mexican class vis-à-vis those impacted by foreign influence.

What could be generalized from this study? First, the ways in which the Mexican state manipulated masculinity and sexuality—so clearly visible in their efforts to define virile citizenship and to denounce homosexuality—would also be deployed in various ways against agents and groups who challenged the supremacy of the PRI’s rule. For example, this occurred against the student and counter-cultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Deviations from a narrowly defined set of sex/gender norms rendered the long-haired young men of the period as threats to the state and justified intervention that included, along with brutal violence, a similar form of paradoxical emasculation/masculination of men through the shaving of their heads and the destruction of their alternative fashion styles that had previously occurred to homosexual men.²⁷ In articles and images, citizens and “good” students were juxtaposed against the “thugs”

²⁷ See for example Elaine Carey, “Los Dueños de México: Power and Masculinity in ‘68,” in *Gender and Sexuality in 1968: Transformative Politics in the Cultural Imagination*, ed. Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 59-84.

who were portrayed as criminals, thugs, racialized others, and deviants with abnormal gender expression. Restoration of the “approved” form of masculinity—or the elimination of alternatives—thus was valuable in campaigns sex/gender deviancy, whether homosexual or, importantly, heterosexual.

Second, Mexican state scrutiny of male bodies—as honed through physical education projects, deployed in institutions like the Tribunal de Menores, and developed by criminologists and sexologists for whom homosexuality was a continuous concern—would be an integral part of national and transnational projects. For example, the methods of discerning healthy and “normal” bodies from those that were not were deployed as part of the transnational process that sent the *braceros* north as workers in the United States during World War II.²⁸ *Braceros* lined up to be examined for everything from lice to hemorrhoids, which given the medical jurisprudence of the day—and its anal fixation—were potential signs of sodomy and unfitness for labor.²⁹ In this way, similar patterns of cataloguing bodies were used both inside institutions like prisons or reform schools among populations marked as deviant and outside among those who, at least until the moment of state scrutiny, were supposedly “normal.” Both Mexican *and* American officials examined the men; thus, the use of transnational understandings of health and hygiene inflected and informed the processes of selecting both those bodies deemed able and appropriate for work, as well as those deemed outside of the body politic or most likely—or most unlikely—to be reformed. Applying this dissertation’s perspectives would further nuance and compliment innovative work on Mexican masculinity and citizenship in national and transnational contexts.

²⁸ Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 98-99.

²⁹ One wonders if men hoping to be *braceros* who were found to have them suffered additional screenings or investigations that determined if they were sexually normative.

But, like this dissertation has shown, the processes with which *braceros* participated in this process and articulated their own visions of masculinity were not always the same as those emanating from the state. Indeed, as Deborah Cohen argues that the process of migration to the US occurred due to a “desire framed specifically in gendered terms—as specifically *men’s* reasons.” Through this gendered process, men became transnational subjects, which was a “new sociopolitical subjectivity or sense of themselves.”³⁰ At the same time that *braceros* were conceiving themselves as part of a new “sociopolitical subjectivity” within a transnational process, homosexual Mexicans were likewise attempting to delineate their own position within both national constraints and transnational processes. In this way, multiple aims overlapped around contested masculinity. There remains, as Gilbert Joseph and Daniel Nugent asserted nearly two decades ago, a need for studies that focus not just the moments when the “tension between emergent popular cultures and processes of state formation” broke down, but also the “dynamics of the state’s day-to-day engagement with grassroots society.”³¹ There also is a need for more studies that situate the resistance *and* complicity of social actors vis-à-vis the state in forming the nation at an everyday level. The ways in which homosexuals challenged authority, while also participating in and shaping national and transnational cultures, is an entry point for these studies. My work shows how masculinity and sexuality is central for understanding the ways in which the state engaged with and sought to define its citizenry within a transnational framework. Indeed, following Aihwa Ong, the nation-state and the transnational are not necessarily opposite spheres; they instead overlap, and some individuals—whether an elite homosexual like Salvador Novo or the *braceros* described above—employed “flexible

³⁰ Ibid., 68.

³¹ Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent, “Popular Culture and State Formation in Revolutionar Mexico,” in *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 3.

citizenship” and agency in negotiating local, national, and transnational flows of people, culture, and ideas, particularly as they converged around masculinity and sexuality.³²

Third, my dissertation demonstrates the importance of urban centers to this process during the twentieth century and shows how a shift from a focus on rural areas to urban areas—which parallels the population shift that occurred during the century—is *necessary* to fully understand forms of state formation, debates on citizenship, and the development of “national” identities and icons. If during the nineteenth century and through the Revolution “every major social transformation has been inextricably linked to popular rural upheavals,” then the same cannot be said for the twentieth century, particularly in the post-revolutionary period.³³ The erotic revolution involved changes that elevated the status of cities, that required internal migration, and that incorporated transnational cultures on a local and national level. In addition, it was in cities and in industrial sites—precisely those areas of most concern for social reformers—that new “types” of modern citizen-subjects appeared, including those that the state, pundits, and cultural figures sought to cleave from the body politic. The rural would not disappear—Mexico was still a majority rural nation until mid-century—but it would take on new discursive meanings for a rapidly developing, urbanizing, and modernizing state. Cities would take on greater importance, and how masculinity and citizenship were contested within them and spread among them is an integral component in twentieth-century Mexican history that is not visible in a rural-centered paradigm.

Fourth, Mexican masculinity, particularly as it was understood in the post-revolutionary period, was manufactured by cultural and social scientific agents who paradoxically sought to

³² Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: the Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999).

³³ Joseph and Nugent cite a public presentation given by Friedrich Katz in 1981. See page 3.

both find authenticity among the popular classes *and* to reform those classes. The Revolution destabilized sex/gender norms, identities, and behaviors—thereby exacerbating a process already underway. This necessitated a politics and cultural politics that incorporated masculinity as a key plank of identity in order to defend individuals and the state from perceived threats, especially those deemed as “foreign.” Thereafter, gender and sexuality would remain integral to efforts by the state and social reformers to craft Mexico into their approved vision.

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